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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an historical and literary investigation of the treatment of the 1979-89 Soviet-Afghan War in contemporary Russian literature. The texts chosen for study include official and unofficial literature, written within the former USSR as well as abroad, and cover publicistic writing, poetry, and prose fiction. These works are described and analyzed with a two-fold purpose: to explore creative trends found in the literature of this subject, and to evaluate the extent to which the genre of Afghan War literature in Russian has changed over the past decade.

In order to provide a context for this literature, the introduction describes the method of socialist realism as it applies to military themes, and the legacy of World War Two novels in Russian. The first chapter provides a brief history of Russian-Afghan relations, and an account of the ten-year intervention. The second chapter documents the dissolution of official censorship during the 1980s, revealing dissent over the Soviet military role in Afghanistan. Chapter Three discusses the evolution of the genre of publicistic writing, and documents its unprecedented frankness through revelations made in Soviet journalistic investigations. Chapter Four provides an overview of song and poetry about the conflict, beginning with magnitizdat produced by amateur songwriters, and later including works by professional poets. Chapter Five discusses novels and short stories about the war. A range of fictional works is traced, from propagandistic portrayals, both pro-and anti-Soviet, to non-ideological, personal interpretations which incorporate lyricism, satire, and fantasy. Chapter Six focuses on the works of Aleksandr Prokhanov, a writer who initially used his fiction to support the war effort, and whose oeuvre charts the disintegration of Party consensus on interpretation and depiction of the events in Afghanistan. The final three chapters treat the works of Oleg Ermakov, whose lyricism and stylistic experimentation mark a new direction for recent Russian war fiction.

The analysis shows Afghan War literature to signal a radical break with recent official Soviet military writing as shaped by socialist realism. This break is evident in the frankness and subjectivity of publicistic writing, and the anti-war sentiment found in a significant minority of published songs and poems. In particular, Oleg Ermakov's prose continues the past legacy of unofficial, dissident war fiction.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis describes and analyzes the Russian literature that has emerged from the 1979-89 Soviet-Afghan War. The approach is primarily synchronic, dealing with the internal characteristics of literary works which have appeared over a relatively brief period of time; limited comparisons with the Soviet literature of World War Two, reviewed in the introduction, will also be included. Because this topic centres on a specific historical event which received little coverage, the thesis initially explores the historical context of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and describes the armies which took part in the conflict. For purposes of discussion, the literature is then divided into three categories: publicistic literature, poetry, and fiction. Internal characteristics, as well as evolution throughout the decade, are charted for each genre. After these overviews, the works of two writers are explored in depth through close readings of selected texts. Aleksandr Prokhanov's fiction reveals how the official Party-approved portrayal of the war lost credibility, then fragmented. Conversely, Oleg Ermakov's prose reflects the emergence of new individual voices setting stylistic and thematic precedents for late twentieth-century Russian military fiction. The background of the thesis, then, is a personal enquiry into ways in which authors disrupt convention, and how literature surprises the reader with stylistic or ideological deviations from the norm. The thesis attempts to explore the ways in which contemporary Russian authors subvert the reader's expectations -- concerning the traditions of Soviet war literature, and more broadly, as in any art form, general human preconceptions about the subject matter at hand.

The introduction of the thesis defines the boundaries of the subject matter to be discussed, and then documents the tenets of socialist realism which were initially

observed by conformist Soviet writers on the war. Boundaries for subject matter are based partially on evaluations given by recent Soviet critics of Afghan War literature, who comment on the genres of song, poetry, and fiction. My subject matter, however, will also include publicistic writing, based on its inclusion by earlier Russian critics of the post-World War Two era as a traditional element of Soviet military literature. In addition, I have included in this study emigre authors, as well as citizens of the former Soviet Union, who have chosen to treat the Afghan War. This inclusion is due to the recent breakup of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Communist Party, events which have hastened the dissolution of previous divisions of Russian literature which were based on the author's citizenship. The introduction concludes with a discussion of the tenets of socialist realism, the official method of aesthetic representation throughout most of the Soviet period, as it applies to military themes in literature; and a brief overview of the legacy of World War Two literature in Russian. These tenets, and the works produced under their influence, are found to remain relatively consistent throughout the post-World War Two period. Except for a small yet significant dissident trend in war literature, socialist realism extends through the era of Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan.

In order to provide a political and historical context for the literature of this relatively unpublicized war, the first chapter briefly documents Russian-Afghan relations from the earliest imperial contacts in 1464 to the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. This background provides a history of Russian expansion toward the south, marked by rivalry with Great Britain in the nineteenth century, and more recently with the United States. The gradual sweep southward is also noteworthy, however, for Russia's traditional wariness of entanglements in Afghanistan. Brezhnev's decision to invade on ideological grounds ignored military realities, and signalled a break with the cautious policies of the past. The Soviet army now found itself engaged with an enemy who in certain instances emulated successful Russian guerrilla tactics against the Germans during the Great Patriotic War forty years

before. This chapter will be useful in subsequent sections to assess how various authors incorporate the history of this region into their works of fiction.

The second chapter provides an historical overview of official measures to accommodate the war in the literary sphere. This process passed through three stages. The first four years of the war saw little official acknowledgement of Soviet participation in combat; news dispatches, publicistic essays, and fiction portrayed Soviets only as peacekeepers. Soldiers composed songs which the authorities felt conveyed a mood of pessimism, and consequently were suppressed. The second stage began around 1984, when the official press began to publicize widely the exploits of soldiers fighting in Afghanistan. This publicistic campaign predominated until 1987, when Gorbachev's policy of glasnost ushered in the third stage of war coverage. Journalists and authors of fiction now began to portray the individual, subjective side of the war. Poetry and song, although composed from the beginning of the war, finally appeared in officially sanctioned publications. At the conclusion to Chapter Two is a review of general Soviet critical reaction to the genre of Afghan War literature. Criticism is practically absent through the mid-1980s, since authors were not allowed to portray Soviet soldiers in combat. Moreover, since that time, the description and evaluation of this nascent literature, with few exceptions, has remained in the background; attention instead has been focused on related social issues, such as assigning culpability for the war, or securing proper treatment for disabled veterans.

The third chapter focuses on publicistic writing about the war. This category of journalistic literature, although nominally grounded in documented fact, underwent a transformation in political orientation and aesthetic form during the 1980s. Beginning with hagiographic accounts of Afghan War heroes which draw upon the tradition of Great Patriotic War publitsistika, this genre moves toward impressionistic first-person accounts, investigative reporting, and the compilation of soldiers' letters containing sentiments which formerly would have been considered unpatriotic. Some writers, such as Artem Borovik and Svetlana Aleksievich, incorporated their own subjective impressions into their depictions of the war, in the process uncovering an extremely

unflattering side of the conflict. Chapter Three draws excerpts from these works to form a composite picture of the Soviet soldier's world as portrayed in publitsistika. Concerning a war which received comparatively little publicity, this picture is valuable in its own right; it also reveals the facts and impressions considered to have value by a new wave of Soviet publicists in the transformed ideological and political environment which emerged in the late 1980s.

The fourth chapter looks at song and poetry from the war. A history of the emergence of 'Afghan' songs is first provided, documenting how initial official disapproval gradually evolved into an acceptance of the topic as a legitimate source for poetic inspiration. The genre of Soviet song is also discussed in order to trace the three main sources of influence: official Soviet 'mass song', soldiers' amateur songs from the Great Patriotic War, and underground guitar poetry which emerged in the 1960s. Dissident emigre poets such as Joseph Brodsky and Lev Losev are also included. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the poetry of Afghan veteran Aleksandr Karpenko, who exemplifies a new generation of poets. His images, like those of the emigre poets, draw inspiration from the classical canon of Russian poetry, and contravene the conventional style and romantic aura of much Soviet 'Afghan' poetry and song.

The fifth chapter reviews Russian prose which has here been held to be representative of fiction written up to and including 1991. Works of Soviet literary propaganda are shown to have roots in socialist realism, and bear resemblance to anti-Soviet novels about the war which were published in the West. Other stories, including some which were published in Soviet military journals, display a certain iconoclasm in depicting problems within the army. These problems include the loss of a sense of purpose among the troops in Afghanistan, corruption among officers, and mistreatment of Afghan civilians by Soviet soldiers. But the greatest contrast to ideologically conformist literature is created by stories published in the larger metropolitan journals such as Nash sovremennik, Znamya, and Novyi mir, as well as in fledgling journals attempting to establish reputations for openness. This fiction is

shown to have evolved from early conformity to socialist realism toward the incorporation of tragic, satiric, and fantastic modes of expression. With the disappearance of centralized control over the press, lyric, non-political portrayals of the war focus on the individual rather than the collective experience of war. Moreover, these works sometimes present Soviet soldiers as vicious, incompetent or ridiculous. Barely two years after the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, Soviet veterans and professional writers have expanded the scope of war literature far beyond previous official boundaries.

Chapter Six focuses on the Afghan War fiction of Aleksandr Prokhanov, who established an early reputation as an officially endorsed journalist and novelist. The chapter documents his initial orthodox interpretation of events in Afghanistan, followed by his disappointment over the Soviet failure to win the war. His themes in stories published after 1988 undergo significant changes, employing negative characters and the portrayal of tactical defeat in battle. While remaining stylistically conformist and ideologically nationalist, the author abandons the genre of the 'political novel', along with the official ideological framework of the Communist Party.

The final three chapters discuss the works of Oleg Ermakov, a young author who appears to be establishing new precedents for Russian literature about the Afghan War. Ermakov describes the soldier's world with documentary detail normally reserved for publitsistika, and a sense of lyricism which is evocative of poetry. He also incorporates historical detail to reinforce his view of the war as one in a sequence of imperialist incursions in Afghanistan. The author satirizes the Party and the military hierarchy, portrays the violent, absurd, and despairing side of armed conflict, and often uses an intellectually-oriented protagonist to emphasize spiritual alienation resulting from the war. Additionally, Ermakov experiments with a modernist prose style which disregards standard syntax, employs stream of consciousness and private symbolism, and which presents a refreshing contrast to the undeviating monotony of typical Soviet military prose. Because of these characteristics, his voice is seen here as a reanimation

of the dissident tradition of Russian war fiction, and an appropriate vehicle for a contemporary portrayal of Russian disillusionment with the Afghan War.

This thesis covers material which previously has not been broadly catalogued, described or critically discussed. No history of glasnost pertaining to the treatment of the Afghan War in literature has been provided to date, nor has there been any comprehensive overview of publicistic writing or soldiers' song and poetry on the topic. The evolution of Afghan War fiction as presented in the military press, and in the 'thick' journals, is also a new topic. The Afghan War fiction of Aleksandr Prokhanov, taken as a whole, has not been discussed, nor have the works of Oleg Ermakov. This thesis is necessarily an initial investigation into a genre which undoubtedly will evolve, but the discussion herein contained serves, I hope, as a starting point to investigate what should prove to be a productive field for Russian poets, authors, and publicists for many years.

The Soviet-Afghan War in Russian Literature

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Carl (1912-1990) and Gretchen Swartz.

Notes

I have used the MLA reference format. Spelling follows the Oxford Slavonic Papers transliteration system, except in the case of conventions for well-known writers such as Tolstoy and Gorky. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Glossary

Listed below for convenience are several specialized terms which are used in the text.

BMD	Soviet assault vehicle
BMP	Soviet infantry fighting vehicle
BTR	Soviet armoured personnel carrier
burbukhaika	Afghan lorry, commonly decorated in bright colours
dedovshchina	harassment of new Soviet recruits by senior soldiers
DRA	(former) Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
KHAD	(former) Afghan government internal security police
kishlak	rural Afghan village
PDPA	(former) Afghan Communist Party, which was divided into two rival factions: Khalq ('Masses') and Parcham ('Flag')
Sarandoy	(former) Afghan government self-defence militia forces
shuravi	Soviets (Afghan term)
VDV	elite Soviet airborne forces
zelenka	cultivated land providing cover for the mujahedin (Soviet term)

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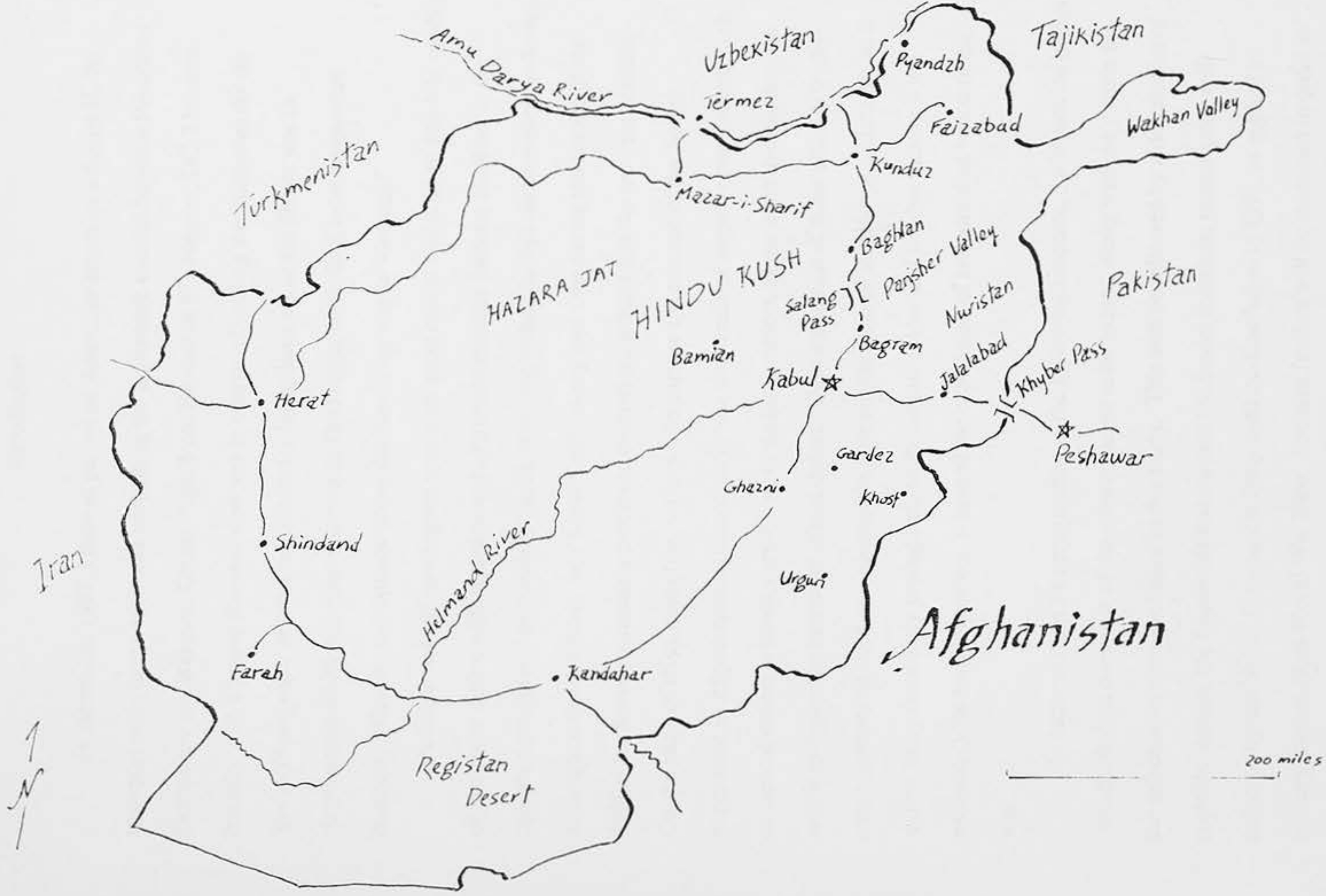
Afghanistan
Amu Darya River
Uzbekistan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Termez
Pyandzh
Faizabad
Wakhan Valley
Kunduz
Mazar-i-Sharif
Baghlan
Panjsher Valley
HAZARA JAT
HINDU KUSH
Salang Pass
Nuristan
Pakistan
Bamian
Begram
Jalalabad
Khyber Pass
Kabul
Herat
Peshawar
Gardez
Ghazni
Khost
Shindand
Iran
Helmand River
Urgun
Farah
Kandahar
Registan Desert
N
200 miles

Introduction

In December 1987, I flew as part of an American escort on a Soviet IL-76 transport aeroplane which was supporting the diplomatic summit between Presidents Gorbachev and Reagan. On the flight from Havana to Washington, DC, I became friendly with a young Russian who was in charge of loading the motorcars for the Soviet contingent. When I asked him for his opinion about the Soviet war in Afghanistan which was then entering its final stage, he replied, in an unguarded moment, 'What is your opinion about the American war in Vietnam?'

Political and military experts may with good reason withhold an absolute verdict of victory or defeat with regard to any of the innumerable factions involved in the complex struggle of the Soviet-Afghan War. Nevertheless, this thesis makes the broad assumption that whatever their limited aims at any one time during the decade of the 1980s, the Soviets ultimately perceived themselves to have lost the ten-year conflict. On the basis of this assumption, writers who capture the essence of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan will necessarily use the details of negative phenomena, such as tactical defeat in battle, corruption, or disillusionment, as the main themes through which to depict the bitterness of that defeat. The recognition of these difficult truths may therefore be used as a measure to note the progress of Russian war literature as it moves away from early propagandistic themes of valour and combat victory -- not necessarily factually incorrect -- toward the expression of an individual vision of the war.

In order to chart this progression in the following chapters, I will provide in this introduction an overview of the subject matter to be treated, along with the criteria for the selection of texts evaluated in this study. This will be followed by a description of socialist realism, the former official method for Soviet literature, promulgated and enforced by the Soviet Communist Party until its dissolution in 1991, as applied to military themes from World War Two. Socialist realism will be discussed in order to trace changes which have occurred in war literature from the beginning of the 1980s, or earlier, to the present day.

Russian commentators usually refer to the native literary treatment of the 1979-89 Soviet-Afghan War as '"Afghan" literature' ('"afganskaya" literatura'). The term is usually highlighted by quotation marks, presumably to differentiate this genre from literature written by the Afghans themselves. As reflected in the few articles of criticism published to date within the former Soviet Union, this genre includes published soldiers' songs or poems, short stories, and novels. This thesis will cover works from each of these categories, and selected pieces from two additional categories as well. The first is publitsistika, or journalistic writing. Works of publitsistika were considered an integral part of the official canon of World War Two literature, as discussed below in the section on socialist realism. Moreover, in the latter stages of the Afghan War, this genre evolved into a powerful medium for individual expression. Journalists who formerly assumed 'objective' perspectives wrote subjective, impressionistic accounts which blurred the distinction between fact and fiction. For these reasons, an overview of publicistic writing about the Afghan War is appropriate for inclusion in a discussion of 'Afghan' literature.

The second additional category is Russian literature written or published outside the former Soviet Union. Although I refer to 'emigre' authors, there is no reason to use separate evaluative criteria for literary works based merely on the country of publication. Here again, traditional boundaries in Russian literature -- at least according to official Soviet critics -- have disappeared because of the political dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the past few years, situations which formerly would have been inconceivable -- the use in the Soviet press of the term samizdat to refer to legal self-publishing, for example, or Soviet citizens sitting on the editorial boards of emigre journals -- became commonplace. Moreover, with the current level of press freedom in the former USSR, individual authors instead of regimes now exercise legal rights guaranteed by international copyright agreements (signed, in any case, by the Soviet Union in 1973) to advance their own interests. Even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, for example, Anatoly Rybakov refused permission for his own book

Children of the Arbat to be published in samizdat (unofficial, underground reproduction within the Soviet Union) or tamizdat (publication abroad) until its official prohibition was lifted in his own country. Likewise, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn erected legal blocks to prevent dramatization of The Gulag Archipelago in the Soviet Union.[1] This dissolution of categories affects 'Afghan' literature as well. To cite one case, Melodiya, the former monopolistic state record company, was authorized in 1988 to record previously suppressed soldiers' songs.[2] In the same spirit, Vladimir Rybakov will be considered an 'Afghan' writer for the purpose of this study, though his book on the Afghan War was published in emigration. Works about the Afghan War in Russian will not be excluded from study merely on the basis of a writer's citizenship.

One additional point concerning authorship requires clarification. At least one commentator in Russia uses the term 'Afghan' literature to distinguish works produced by veterans from those of non-veterans. In a review of 'Afghan' prose in Literaturnaya gazeta, Lieutenant Colonel Petr Tkachenko, literary critic and correspondent of the military newspaper Krasnaya zvezda, chose the more general and traditional rubric 'military prose' (voennaya proza) when treating the Afghan War stories of professional writers who had not served as combatants in Afghanistan.[3] This differentiation is understandable from both the political and artistic points of view. Veterans have suffered from lack of recognition, as well as from inaccurate portrayals bordering on propagandistic exploitation.[4] Few would discount the value of first-hand experience as a requirement for the writer. Nevertheless, there is no reason to suspect that this war in all its aspects will prove to be unique by virtue of drawing chroniclers exclusively from the ranks. Veterans with no experience in Afghanistan, reporters who worked in the field, and writers armed with nothing more than insight and second-hand observation

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[1]For Rybakov, see 'Publish and Flourish', Time 10 April 1989: 107; for Solzhenitsyn, see Christina Balas, 'Waiting for Solzhenitsyn (in Moscow)', International Herald Tribune 28-29 April 1990: 24.
[2]Vremya vybralo nas, Pesni voinov-internatsionalistov (Pts. 1-4), Melodiya, M60 48301 006; M60 48303 000; M60 48305 005; M60 48307 000; 1988.
[3]Petr Tkachenko, '"My eshche ne vernulis"...', Literaturnaya gazeta 18 Oct. 1989: 3.
[4]Dmitri Ol'shansky, 'Afganskii sindrom', Literaturnoe obozrenie 3 (1990): 14.

may all make significant contributions to the literature. The topic of war will be the sole criterion in establishing boundaries for selecting texts to be treated here.

In order to chart the evolution of this subject matter, an initial description of socialist realism as applied to war literature will be useful. The tenets of Party-approved Soviet military writing in the post-World War Two era may be reasonably held to be represented in the Voenizdat publication The Image of the Soviet Soldier in Creative Literature by L. N. Fomenko and A. M. Nikitin.[5] Their guidelines will be used as a baseline with which to compare subsequent descriptions of socialist realism, and later to chart the evolution of Afghan War literature.

Fomenko states that the defining characteristic of official Soviet military writing -- which includes fiction, poetry (42-43), and publicistic writing (49) -- is the 'leading artistic method' known as socialist realism. And as in Soviet literature in general, this method when applied to the genre of war literature is based on the indissoluble trinity of narodnost' ('mass character') , partiinost' ('party-mindedness'), and ideinost' ('ideological correctness') (60-61). Fomenko defines narodnost' in the war genre as 'the multi-faceted disclosure of national life, the creation of full-blooded images of both a national hero, and of the nation as a whole, in service to the sacred interests of Socialist Russia.' Partiinost' is the Communist Party's exclusive ability to inspire writers 'to describe Soviet society accurately, and to view events of social life in all their complexity and fullness.' Ideinost' is the medium of politically correct ideas through which the Party exercises this unique ability to inspire; it 'helps the people to build communism.' Thus, the writer's theme must incorporate the interests and life experiences of the masses, defined in practical terms by the Soviet Communist Party, as outlined generally by Marxism-Leninism.

Any attempt to establish a theoretical hierarchy for these three attributes quickly reveals a Gordian knot of inseparable ideas, which is why Stalin and his successors

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[5]L. N. Fomenko and A. M. Nikitin, Obraz sovetskogo voina v khudozhestvennoi literature (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1963). Subsequent references to page numbers of this work, to which each co-author contributed separate chapters, will be included in the text.

(until Gorbachev) simply used Alexander's solution to any intractable theoretical issues. Nevertheless, Fomenko emphasizes the Party's authority in defining the terms of the other two attributes, thus establishing 'party-mindedness' as the ideological primus inter pares. 'The Communist Party has raised up the standard of a new truth, our truth, Soviet truth' (58). Fomenko further asserts that the image of the Party member receives its most convincing treatment in the second edition of Fadeev's World War Two novel The Young Guard. In that book, the previously minor character of Ivan Protsenko, the underground communist leader, becomes a major protagonist and leader of the masses (60-61).

Within this general framework, several secondary characteristics of officially approved war literature may also be defined. The first is didacticism. According to Fomenko, 'our literature constitutes a school of valour and heroism, a school of high Communist morality' (3). Pavel Korchagin, the hero of Nikolai Ostrovsky's novel How the Steel Was Tempered, 'hardens [the soldier's] will in his struggle with his enemies, and teaches him how to subordinate personal interests to the interests of the people as a whole.' The critic emphasizes that 'this book [Steel] taught us to love our Motherland and hate our enemies, taught us fearlessness and courage' (40-42). Thus, in a utilitarian spirit, war literature should provide an ideological field manual, as it were, with which a soldier may overcome threats to his fighting spirit.

The next desired secondary characteristic of Soviet war literature is a combination of 'internationalism' and Russian patriotism. 'The Red Army soldier is an internationalist; nationalist narrow-mindedness is alien to him', asserts Fomenko (44). In like manner, the author claims that the universality of Soviet war literature inspired the Vietnamese to prevail against the French, and helped the Chinese Communists in their victory over their Nationalist foes (42-43). This internationalist struggle, however, is led by the Russian people, and for writers to lose sight of the patriotic element of Soviet war literature presumably damages the internationalist cause as well. Therefore, 'writers illustrate the fate of heroes who are indissolubly linked with the fate of Russia' (56).

Another secondary quality of approved war literature is the incorporation of history into the ideological subtext. The publicistic works of Aleksei Tolstoy -- Fomenko cites the article 'Rodina' printed in Krasnaya zvezda and Pravda of 7 November 1941 -- 'are distinguished by profound historicity' (49). The historical significance of the Soviet peoples' victory should be the primary theme in any work: 'wherever Soviet soldiers passed [in World War Two], the shackles of slavery fell; the peoples of western Europe for the first time in their histories straightened their bent backs' (58).

Stylistic considerations are not neglected by these critics. Those authors who employ romanticism -- defined as the portrayal of heroes who are drawn toward the beautiful and the heroic -- are singled out for praise (57), as are writers who present only positive characters (67). Such is the case with Nikolai Chukovsky, whose novel Baltic Sky (1959) 'does not appear one-sided in that ... the author carefully delineates individual character traits ... [and in the end, every character] finds a place in the collective' (67). But Fomenko also praises the interest in psychological characterization shown by writers during the 1950s (61), and notes that the literature of the 1960s includes frank descriptions of the horror of war. The latter tendency, exemplified in the works of Grigory Baklanov and Yury Bondarev, receives some criticism for a 'loss of objectivity', and failure to render properly the heroic spirit of the Soviet soldier (82-83). Nevertheless, 'a feeling of optimism does not leave us when we are reading' these works. And a certain willingness among authors to criticize is tolerated; Nikitin notes that Konstantin Simonov reveals Stalin's excesses, as well as tactical mistakes and strategic errors made by Soviet commanders during the war, in his novel The Living and the Dead (written from 1959 to 1971). These allowances may be made as long as the author 'shows the leading role of the Soviet government, the Party, and the people' (116-17). In other words, the ideological line of the current Party leadership is emphasized as the primary consideration in using the method of socialist realism.

This method proved to be remarkably durable in serving the needs of its caretakers, but war literature was not completely static over the next few decades.

Joseph Brodsky divides Soviet literature on the Great Patriotic War into two categories, pre- and post-1960s.[6] Books in the former category he describes as 'didactic and emblematic', with the single exception of Victor Nekrasov's In the Trenches of Stalingrad (1946). This book featured characters who 'talked, fought, feared, boozed and died as close to the real as the stylistic idiom of the time could allow.' In the post-1960s came the successors to Nekrasov's fiction, says Brodsky, who wrote the so-called 'literature of lieutenants': Vasil' Bykov, Yury Bondarev, Georgy Baklanov. These authors convey the 'individual suffering ... the non-heroic, often shabby circumstances of fighting and dying.' But Brodsky believes that 'over the last four decades, the stylistic nature of Russian prose hasn't advanced very much.'[7]

Two works may be cited, however, as possible exceptions to Brodsky's generalization. The first is Bulat Okudzhava's Good Luck, Schoolboy! (1961) in which a young man experiences war as a meaningless series of violent episodes. The second work is Vladimir Voinovich's The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Ivan Chonkin (1963-1970), a long-suppressed anti-Stalinist satire which is set during the initial stage of the German invasion of Russia. The eponymous hero is concerned only with his immediate surroundings on a dilapidated collective farm, where he has been posted, and forgotten, as a guard for an abandoned aeroplane. Both of these works, however, were among the last of their kinds. Arnold McMillin noted that 'In the present day, Soviet war prose is once more close to being entirely discredited'.[8] As a case in point, McMillin cites the example of Ivan Stadnyuk,

> a mediocre war writer and apologist for Stalin, whose novel Voina (War, 1974-80) amazed literary opinion inside and outside the Soviet Union by being awarded the State Prize for Literature in 1983, an event with perhaps more serious implications and certainly less anecdotal possibilities than the earlier award of the even more prestigious Lenin Prize to a war epic by Mr. Brezhnev himself.[9]

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[6]Joseph Brodsky, 'Literature and War -- A Symposium', The Times Literary Supplement 17 May 1985: 543.
[7]Brodsky, 'Literature and War' 544.
[8]Arnold McMillin, 'The Second World War in Official and Unofficial Russian Prose', Forum for Modern Language Studies 21.1 (1985): 28.
[9]McMillin 25-26.

From this, it is apparent that war literature had changed little in the post-war era; what small victories had been achieved were negated during the closing years of Brezhnev's regime. Indeed, a 1988 article in Znamya by General A. D. Lizichev, Chief of the Main Political Directorate of the the Soviet Armed Forces, suggests that there was a remarkable continuity in official values.[10] The general does not mention the term 'socialist realism'; instead, he uses the term 'socialist literature'. Characteristics which are identical to the war literature using socialist realism discussed above, however, are described. He emphasizes the utilitarian qualities of this type of writing, for example, by stating that, along with the Soviet people, 'literature also fought' in the Great Patriotic War, making its contribution to victory with 'the inspiring phrases of publitsistika and the bright images of literary prose, patriotic poetry, songs' (165). Literature later 'played a role in ideological warfare, protecting the army against the dark tide of bourgeois falsifications ... and imperialist psychological subversion' (166). The stylistic characteristics of the positive hero, combined with thematic revolutionary optimism (166) constitute 'supporting artillery' in the fight against a failure of will, and serves as 'the commander' of the Soviet army's morale (171).

This article not only reaffirms the values of socialist realism, but also attacks those who now deride its merits. 'Soldiers and officers ask: when will substantial new works about the contemporary army appear? Why do certain writers, with only hearsay knowledge of army life, depict it untruthfully? ... [Why do they print stories which show] only the negative aspects of military service?' (172) Lizichev also discusses the 'deformation of the Great Patriotic War in literature', blaming what he terms 'subjectivism' and 'superficial evaluations'. He decries the subdivision of the war into 'the general's truth', 'the staff-officer's truth' and the 'soldier's truth, or truth of the trenches. There is only one truth: the truth of war' (175). Stylistically, Lizichev criticizes 'the tendency toward naturalism in language', which in his opinion leads to a

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[10] A. D. Lizichev, 'Sotsialisticheskaya armiya i literatura', Znamya 2 (1988): 160-76.

loss of the sense of artistry in prose (176). He sees one bright prospect on the horizon in Aleksandr Prokhanov, a writer of Afghan War fiction,

> who has been able to find heroes for his fiction in far-off garrisons and beyond the borders of our Motherland, and amidst the experiences of commanders and prematurely greying soldiers [a reference to a cliché of Soviet World War Two writing, which is also used in one of Prokhanov's short stories about the Afghan War, 'The Grey-Haired Soldier'] who are not yet twenty years of age. This writer did not indifferently pass by a 'tree in the centre of Kabul' [the name of Prokhanov's first novel about the Afghan War] but instead accurately portrayed the daily life of the Soviet soldier's service, his patriotism, his internationalism, his incorruptible soul. (175)

Thus, as late as 1988, the Party's view of war literature remained true to the values asserted by Fomenko and Nikitin twenty-five years before. These values start with the primacy of the Party in helping the artist to provide an ideologically correct picture of the people. The picture itself should be educational and inspirational, and include themes imbued with patriotism, internationalism and historicity. Other desired thematic qualities include optimistic plots with positive heroes. Lastly, although 'romanticism' is permitted, 'subjectivism' is proscribed.

The fact that these functions of literature are taken seriously in the military establishment was reflected in a question asked of me by Lieutenant Colonel Tkachenko in September 1991, after the failed coup resulted in the collapse of the Communist Party. During a conversation at the Writers' Union in Moscow, I told him that in my opinion there was a strong anti-military theme in western literature. Thinking of the future of his own nation, perhaps, he asked me, 'How do western armies maintain their morale in such an environment?'[11] Throughout the Afghan conflict, which will be described in the next chapter, the individual dissenting voice -- such as that of the young Soviet crewman on the flight from Havana -- had no place in orthodox Soviet war literature.

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[11]Petr Tkachenko, personal interview, Moscow, 26 September 1991.

Chapter One

A History of Russian-Afghan Relations

The spectacular mountains, lush valleys, and arid deserts of Afghanistan have borne patient witness to repeated invasions over the centuries, from the advance of the Macedonians under Alexander the Great to the recent retreat of the Russians under Lieutenant-General Gromov. Indeed, one compelling reason for studying the history of this region is the remarkable continuity of events from ancient to modern times. A mocking enemy told Alexander he would need 'winged soldiers' to defeat a mountain stronghold; two thousand years later, Soviet air assault detachments in helicopters used that advice against mujahedin gun emplacements.[1] Conversely, Alexander completed the final encirclement of Kabul by subduing the Panjsher Valley to the north of that city, a strategic feat which the Soviets never managed to duplicate.[2] To chart such continuity and change for the Soviets, this chapter will open with a brief history of the Russian experience in Afghanistan from the earliest imperial contacts to the outbreak of the most recent war. An account of the Soviet invasion and occupation, 1979-1989, will be provided, followed by brief overviews of Afghan culture, of the mujahedin soldier which it produced, and of the Soviet soldier sent to fight. The chapter will conclude with a comparison of this conflict with the Soviet experience in the Great Patriotic War.

Ivan III was the first Russian tsar to send a mission to the lands which would later become known as Afghanistan. In 1464, two years after the young ruler ascended the throne of Muscovy, his delegates were received with great ceremony at Herat, capital city of the vast empire carved out by Timur (Tamerlane) more than half a century before and now ruled by Abu-Said. The first reciprocal mission headed by an

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[1]Louis Dupree, Afghanistan (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1973) 231.
[2]Ikbal Ali Shah, Afghanistan of the Afghans (London: Octagon, 1982) 22-23.

ambassador was not dispatched from Kabul until the subsequent reign of Zakhir-ad-din Babur, who did not live to hear of his ambassador's safe arrival and friendly reception at the Moscow court in 1533. The trade in flax, cloth, and leather along traditional caravan routes between India, Afghanistan and Russia paved the way for these initial diplomatic contacts.[3]

The security of these trading routes was the subject of a diplomatic exchange more than a century later as the Russian empire rapidly expanded to the east and south. In 1669, Ambassador Boris Pazukhin visited Balkh and Kabul to secure safe passage for Russian caravans threatened by conflict with Persia.[4] Over the next several decades, however, internal Afghan politics, never an orderly affair even in the best of times, daunted Russian enthusiasm despite talks about expanded trade.[5] Peter the Great sent a trade mission to Khiva and Bukhara in 1718, but war between Turkey and Afghanistan from 1736 to 1747 brought all commerce to a halt.[6] Elphinstone writes of his 1808 diplomatic mission to the Afghan Shah on behalf of the British Governor of India:

> ... a single inhabitant of the Russian empire may now and then come down with a caravan (like a man of Astrakhan whom I met at Moultaun), but none reside in the country. It seems to be believed in Europe, that the Russians have a factory and some influence in Bulkh; but there is certainly no foundation for the notion; I could hear of no establishment of theirs nearer than Orenburg (to the north of the Caspian Sea), except their conquests in the northwest of Persia.[7]

Indeed, Elphinstone was sent to counter potential French influence in the area, not Russian.

The opening decades of the nineteenth century, however, cast Afghanistan in a new light for the burgeoning empire to the north. Foreign Minister Rumyantsev cast

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[3]M. R. Arunova, 'Iz istorii pervykh russkikh posol'stv na territorii Afganistana (seredina XV-nachalo XIX v.)', Afganistan: ekonomika, politika, istoriya, ed. Yu. V. Gankovsky (Moscow: Nauka, 1984) 97.
[4]Arunova 98.
[5]Ronald R. Rader, 'The Russian Military and Afghanistan: An Historical Perspective', Soviet Armed Forces Review Annual, ed. David Jones, vol. 4 (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International, 1981) 308.
[6]Arunova 99.
[7]Hon. Mountstuart Elphinstone, An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul (London: Longman, Hurst, 1815) 289.

covetous eyes on British India's treasures, and wondered if Central Asia might not bestow equal wealth upon Russia. Six trade missions from 1803-1824 attempted to realize this renewed ambition.[8] Additionally, Russia had been fighting with Persia intermittently since 1807 over Georgian lands.[9] Persian forces were defeated in their jihad, or Moslem holy war, and they ceded the Caucasus to the soldiers of Orthodoxy with the Treaty of Turkmenchai in 1828.[10] Although the actual subjugation of the Caucasian Moslems would continue to bedevil the Russian army for another thirty years, Persia became for the time being a vassal state under Russian influence. Nicholas I used this influence for his opening gambit in the 'Great Game', as the nineteenth-century rivalry between Britain and Russia came to be known, which was unfolding against the British in India. In 1837 he supported the Persian Shah against the Khanate of Herat, as the Shah's traditional rival moved to occupy the western half of present-day Afghanistan.[11] If successful, Russian influence swathed in Persian robes would advance to the east toward the independent kingdom of Dost Mohammed, whose capital in Kabul would be the only remaining buffer between the two European powers.

Neither Britain nor Russia was particularly ambitious to absorb these lands into their respective empires, but hoped merely to counter the influence of the other. Moscow recognized Kabul diplomatically for the first time in 1837, and Jan Vitkevich, chief of mission, sought at least to neutralize English influence in Kabul and Kandahar.[12] In the end, his intrigues were for nought. The Russian-directed siege of Herat failed in 1838, and the Governor-General of India launched an expeditionary

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[8]Michael Rywkin, Moscow's Muslim Challenge (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1982) 8. The six missions included unsuccessful caravans in 1803 and 1824, Rafialov's two previously mentioned visits, and two official information-gathering trips in 1819-20. Two minor discrepancies might be noted between Rywkin and Arunova: the former source calls Count Rumyantsev the minister of commerce (compare minister of foreign affairs in Arunova); and lists 1819 (compare 1812) as the date of the formation of the Asian Department.
[9]Harvey H. Smith and others, Area Handbook for Afghanistan, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: GPO, 1973) 47.
[10]Ivar Spector, The Soviet Union and the Muslim World 1917-1958 (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1959) 7.
[11]Rader 308.
[12]Rader 308.

force toward Afghanistan to counter Vitkevich's diplomatic front.[13] The First Afghan War between the British and the Afghans (1839-42) saw the fall of Kandahar, Ghazni, and Kabul, the subsequent destruction of the retreating British army, and the coup de grace by a second invasion, all with Russia a dismayed onlooker from the northern steppe.[14]

Yet the tsars were not to be discouraged from opportunities closer to home. Prince Alexander Gorchakov's memorandum to Alexander II expressing the Imperial Chancellor's belief that 'the future of Russia lies in Asia' accurately describes the direction taken by Russian armies after the bitter defeat of the Crimean War in 1856. The subjugation of Tashkent and Samarkand in the 1860s, followed by the fall of the Khanates of Khiva and Kokand during the following decade, brought the Russian empire to the banks of the Amu Darya river.[15] British ascendency in Afghanistan, maintained through subsidies to the Emir, was never seriously questioned by the Russians -- the Anglo-Russian 'Gentlemen's Agreement' of 1873 recognized Afghanistan as lying within Britain's sphere of influence -- but this did not lessen the rivalry.[16] Faced down by the British in the Dardanelles despite victory over the Turks in 1875, the Russians sent a retaliatory diplomatic mission to Kabul. The British were refused similar recognition, and so they precipitated the Second Afghan War in 1878. A Russian general ignored Sher Ali's plea for help, claiming that a winter march across the Hindu Kush would be impossible. This once again left the field to the British. Two years of fighting secured a neutral leader for the throne with Britain in control of Afghanistan's foreign affairs.[17]

The end of that campaign coincided with the ascension of Alexander III in Russia, who continued a remarkably conciliatory policy in the area throughout a period fraught with danger. During this time, Shah Abdur Rahman consolidated his hold over

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[13]Shah 31.
[14]Dupree, Afghanistan 377. However, an unsuccessful march was attempted on Khiva by General Perovsky. See Rywkin 8-9.
[15]Spector 13-14.
[16]Rader 309.
[17]Dupree, Afghanistan 407.

a succession of indigenous Afghan tribes, gradually approaching the borders of his more powerful neighbours. Initially considered by the Russians to be friendly due to his previous exile in Samarkand, the Shah nevertheless fought with his former hosts, suffering the loss in 1885 of two oases in a defeat on the Kushk River.[18] Russian newspapers of the time reflect the mounting tension as British forces moved westward through India; war was predicted with Britain and Afghanistan, and some editorials encouraged a full-scale invasion to take Herat.[19] Three more border clashes with Afghanistan followed in the next decade: at Samatash (1892) where the tsarist forces won, and at Imts (1893) and Shakh Dara (1894) where neither side could claim victory. At the end of the day, however, peaceful diplomatic relations reigned. The British bequeathed the Walkan Corridor to an unwilling Afghanistan in order to separate the two imperial powers. Additionally, the Russians absorbed a contested area to the north in the 1895 Anglo-Russian Pamir Boundary Agreement.[20]

This diplomatic agreement marks a de-escalation of the 'Great Game'. This rivalry was transformed into alliance with the rise of Germany as a common adversary, and the emergence of new priorities for a beleaguered Russian tsar. The Russian defeat in the 1905 Russo-Japanese War and the subsequent revolutionary events resulted in troop withdrawals from Central Asia, thus weakening the Russian hold in the area.[21] Two years later the Anglo-Russian Convention, legalized over the objections of Afghan King Habibullah, now officially placed Afghanistan outside of Russian influence.[22] This paved the way for Afghanistan's policy of neutrality during World War One and a reduced interest in Afghanistan on the part of the new Soviet state, especially since the Central Asian khanates had to be reconquered for Bolshevik Communism.

Afghanistan won its independence from the British in the spring of 1919 after Amanullah succeeded to the throne. The Third Afghan War lasted three weeks, during

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[18]Spector 18.
[19]Dupree, Afghanistan 423.
[20]Rader 311.
[21]Rader 312.
[22]Dupree, Afghanistan 433.

which Britain used her Royal Air Force to win the battle; she relinquished control only at the negotiating table. Lenin was the first head of state to recognize the new Afghan government, and sent a representative to Habibullah's court that autumn, trying to secure the new Afghan leader's support against Central Asian tribes unwilling to submit to Bolshevik rule.[23] Though unsuccessful in this mission, Lenin remained fulsome in his praise for the 'only independent Moslem state in the world' and promised the Emir a one million gold ruble subsidy per year, plus aircraft and 5,000 rifles.[24] To cement the deal, a Treaty of Friendship was signed between the two new states in 1921.[25]

This treaty, however, masked a basic conflict of interest. The Basmachi Rebellion, as the Central Asian struggle came to be known, pitted Soviet Bolsheviks against Moslem tribes who had roots, and often rapidly changing allegiances, on both sides of the border. Fires were only fanned when the Bolsheviks instituted conscription in 1921, undeterred by an equally unpopular tsarist attempt in 1916.[26] Amanullah gave support and refuge to guerrilla fighters who were vehemently opposed to joining the Red Army, but he could afford little else as Soviet impatience grew into an ultimatum in 1922. By this time the Soviets also were supporting intertribal rivalries, so that raids against Afghan villages carried out by the Jamshidi tribe, who lived on the northern side of the border, were encouraged in order to counter Amanullah's support of Bukharan nationalists in the Ferghana Valley.[27] Further military setbacks for the rebel forces, coupled with Soviet diplomatic protests, pressured the Afghan leader into accepting the inevitability of Soviet rule in Central Asia. In 1924 he even availed himself of eleven Soviet aeroplanes with a complement of pilots and mechanics to suppress a tribal rebellion on his own territory.[28]

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[23]Dupree, Afghanistan 443.
[24]Joseph J. Collins, The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan (Lexington, KY: Lexington Books, 1986) 9.
[25]Dupree, Afghanistan 445.
[26]Collins, Soviet Invasion 10.
[27]Rader 314.
[28]Collins, Soviet Invasion 10-11.

The Basmachi warriors, however, hardly considered the issue closed. Their struggle, fuelled into the 1930s by forced collectivization, would prove to be the main disruption to an otherwise respectful distance maintained between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan. For example, in 1925 the Soviets seized a small island in the Amu Darya River, which was being used as a guerrilla base, when the changing course of the river suddenly positioned the island to the north of the border. War with Afghanistan was avoided, however, by a subsequent Treaty of Non-Aggression in which the Soviets agreed to return the island.[29] After Amanullah's western-style reforms resulted in his overthrow during the 1929 Afghan civil war, the new ruler, an illiterate Tajik warrior named Bacha-i-Saqquo, allowed rebels to stage open raids across the border. His reign, and his support for the Basmachi movement, met an untimely end a year later at the hands of Nadir Shah, a member of the traditionally ascendant Durrani tribe. When Soviet forces penetrated forty miles into Afghan territory in unsuccessful pursuit of the Uzbek guerrilla leader Ibrahim Beg, Nadir Shah demonstrated his new policy of appeasement by chasing Beg back across the border and into the hands of the Soviets.[30] At the same time, Nadir Shah quietly sent home a number of Russian air force advisors while accepting a British arms shipment, marking a return to neutrality abroad and consensus-building social conservatism at home. This did not dismay the Soviets, who in 1931 willingly renewed the Neutrality and Non-Agression Treaty with the Afghan government to ensure a more stable border.[31]

The spirit of the treaty was upheld for the next fifteen years as the Soviets became engulfed in Stalinization, the Great Patriotic War, and the momentous task of post-war reconstruction.[32] Only the United States was a potential counterweight to Soviet influence after Britain's withdrawal from India in 1947, but the Americans chose to support newly independent Pakistan instead as a member of the Baghdad Pact. In

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[29]Dupree, Afghanistan 448.
[30]Dupree, Afghanistan 460.
[31]Rader 315.
[32]Collins, Soviet Invasion 13, 17.

turn, rivalry between Pakistan and Afghanistan over land occupied by Pushtun tribes, divided arbitrarily since 1893 by the Durand Line, tilted Afghanistan toward the Soviets. Soviet-Afghan trade in petrol, cotton and sugar doubled between 1950-52, and by 1956, Russian technicians and money were helping to build airports, hydroelectric plants, irrigation projects, and roads.[33] Moreover, potential conflict with Pakistan compelled the Afghan government to supplant traditional reliance on tribal militias with a professional army. Unconstrained by Stalinist ideological prejudice toward developing nations, Khrushchev stepped in with the required aid after the Americans balked.[34] Tanks and aircraft, airbase construction and cadet training programmes were initiated, which would total $275 million over the next six years.[35] Russian became the lingua franca for Afghan military technicians.[36]

This is not to say that offers of American economic aid were turned down. In retrospect, Prince Mohammed Daoud, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan, managed a clever balancing act during his tenure of office from 1953 to 1963. The superpower contestants were allowed to operate within their respective zones of influence -- the Russians to the north of the Hindu Kush, the Americans to the south -- while Afghanistan remained the neutral beneficiary of economic aid from both sides.[37] Nevertheless, Soviet stock in Afghanistan rose through the skillful application of aid to popular, high-visibility projects such as road paving in the capital, while the Americans laboured over the poorly designed and grossly mismanaged Helmand River Dam project and the Kandahar airport. The latter complex, rumoured to be designed as a staging base for American bombers, but ostensibly an intermediate stop-over for commercial propeller-driven aircraft following the ancient silk trading routes, was rendered obsolete by the introduction of commercial jet fleets before construction could

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[33]Collins, Soviet Invasion 31.
[34]Andre Brigot and Olivier Roy, The War in Afghanistan (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988) 23.
[35]Collins, Soviet Invasion 23.
[36]Henry S. Bradsher, Afghanistan and the Soviet Union (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1983) 28.
[37]Dupree, Afghanistan 529.

be completed. (Ironically, the Soviets would use the base as regional headquarters for their occupation of the southern territories twenty years later.[38]) This well-targeted Soviet aid, nearly twice the amount given by the U.S., continued even after Daoud's dismissal in 1963 due to accusations of liberalism in domestic affairs and pro-Communism in foreign relations.[39]

King Zahir appointed a succession of five prime ministers over the next ten years as hopes for political consensus dissolved into bickering between conservative and radical interests.[40] The radicals initially coalesced around a writer named Nur Mohammed Taraki. Early in his career Taraki had received substantial royalties from the Soviet government for translations into Russian of his Pushtun novels on peasant life (he himself was of humble origin), as well as one book about Maxim Gorky.[41] In 1965 he created the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) and was elected general secretary. He did not attempt to disguise his political sympathies, but rather used the first (and last) six issues of the party newspaper Khalq ('Masses') to proclaim the virtues of land reform, heavy industry, a planned economy, and in the creative sphere, socialist realism.[42] Babrak Karmal, a young PDPA representative in parliament, was more inclined to use political alliances within the National Assembly for achieving his goals. In 1967 Karmal formed a PDPA splinter group called Parcham ('Flag') which attracted many students, intellectuals, and bureaucrats away from Taraki's Khalq faction.[43] Karmal's own credentials hardly befitted a Marxist: the son of a general, he supported Prince Daoud in the latter's long-range preparations for a return to power.[44]

Daoud's return occurred in July 1973, when he staged a successful coup with the backing of the armed forces and the Parcham faction, seizing the reins of

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[38]Bradsher, Soviet Invasion 29.
[39]Collins, Soviet Invasion 24-26.
[40]Brigot and Roy 25-26.
[41]Bradsher 36.
[42]Dupree, Afghanistan 608. The paper was banned after the first six issues.
[43]Bradsher 50.
[44]Brigot and Roy 26.

government for a second time in as many decades.[45] The Soviets, while never ceasing to ship weapons, machinery and agricultural goods in ever-increasing amounts, were anxious about Daoud's growing willingness to open talks with Pakistan, China and the US, and so did nothing to discourage radical parties from expressing contempt for the Afghan government.[46] Probably at the behest of Moscow, Khalq and Parcham reunited in 1977 to form a single-front PDPA through the negotiations of the Indian Communist Party. Thus, when an influential PDPA member, Mir Akbar Khyber, was assassinated in April 1978, demonstrators took to the streets in an angry and convincing show of united political will. The identity of the assassin -- whether rival party member or government agent -- was never discovered, but Daoud attempted to suppress a potentially lethal situation by ordering mass arrests of opposition leaders. Due to police incompetence, however, Hafizullah Amin, Taraki's chief lieutenant, remained free to communicate with his contacts in the army and air force, during which he activated a well-rehearsed plan for counterattack. The next day Daoud, his family, and several thousand loyal troops were gunned down by revolutionary soldiers supported by air force jets flying overhead. The coup was successful, and Taraki was named prime minister of the new Democratic Republic of Afghanistan.[47] The Soviets, while probably taken by surprise at the sudden turn of events, had always shown more support to the PDPA than to Daoud's government.[48] Just as in 1919, the Soviets were the first to recognize Taraki's fledgling socialist state.[49]

The Khalq leader's revolutionary policies showed neither practicality nor moderation. The new secret police organization, trained by Soviets and East Germans, quickly became infamous for imprisonment, torture, and summary execution of

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[45]Brigot and Roy 34-35.
[46]Collins, Soviet Invasion 38-40.
[47]Collins, Soviet Invasion 48-49; Robert Rand, 'A Chronology of Soviet-Afghan Relations: April 1978-January 1980', Radio Liberty Research Bulletin 17/80 (11 Jan. 1980): 1.
[48]Collins, Soviet Invasion 33.
[49]M. R. Solov'eva and A. A. Svetlov, 'Traditsii sovetsko-afganskoi druzhby', Afganistan: ekonomika, politika, istoriya, ed. Yu. V. Gankovsky (Moscow: Nauka, 1984) 16.

political opponents.[50] Rival Parcham members within his government were purged as the PDPA coalition quickly fell apart: for example, Babrak Karmal, vice-president and deputy prime minister, was demoted to ambassador and sent to Czechoslovakia, then recalled to face charges of treason (he fled to East Germany rather than stand trial).[51] Taraki's reforms also sparked off widespread revolt in rural areas, which were targets for his revolutionary programmes to promote literacy, women's rights, and land redistribution.[52] The friction generated by Taraki's social policies was perhaps felt even more intensely by conservative, rural, male-dominated society. Religious leaders often were simply taken away, to be replaced by youths from the city who preached a secular gospel of social equality for women, and who demanded that power now be vested in governmental bureaucracy. Confrontational tactics, such as co-educational classes in the government's literacy campaign, or violent attacks on women wearing the chadri (full-length veil) likewise were destined to enrage a tribal society suspicious of outside influences.[53]

Popular revolt against these measures broke out the same year in Nuristan. In the spring of 1979, an attack by rebels and mutinous government troops in Herat left over fifty Soviet advisors and their family members dead; many were publicly tortured before being killed. After the mass execution of an arrested group of young fundamentalists in June, insurrection spread throughout the country.[54] The Soviet authorities could no longer ignore the seriousness of the situation; the Khalq faction, and its identification with 'infidel' Russian foreigners (not only in rhetoric and policy: the newly designed Afghan flag was entirely red, displaying a star, sheaves of wheat, and the name Khalq, which could not have reassured Afghans separated by only one

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[50]Anthony Hyman, Afghanistan Under Soviet Domination, 1964-81 (London: Macmillan, 1982) 108.
[51]Rand 3.
[52]Olivier Roy, Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 88.
[53]Roy 94. Attacks against women wearing the chadri were necessarily an urban phenomenon where the radicals were concentrated; also, only in urban environments is the chadri worn. This full-length garment (also called the burqa) would prevent a nomad or rural woman from carrying out her tasks and hence is not found in the countryside. See Veronica Doubleday, Three Women of Herat (London: Jonathan Cape, 1988) 3, 10.
[54]Brigot and Roy 44.

generation from the Basmachi Rebellion) inspired such hatred that the country was quickly becoming ungovernable.[55] A month-long fact-finding mission headed by Ivan G. Pavlovsky, Soviet commander-in-chief of ground forces, probably tipped the scales in favour of full-scale armed intervention.[56]

From March until December the Soviet military was engaged in developing plans for this invasion. In reprisal for the Herat uprising, Soviet aircraft flying from bases within the USSR bombed the city and caused thousands of casualties and much damage.[57] More importantly, Russian soldiers and military advisors, tanks and supplies were now being airlifted in to bolster an Afghan army torn by defections and mutiny.[58] Not only the military was suffering from internal disorder; Taraki was also being undermined by his more ambitious foreign affairs minister Hafizullah Amin. This politically ruthless operative, who had engineered the original 1978 April Revolution, had managed in early 1979 to appoint himself prime minister and de facto leader of the country by promoting his mentor Taraki to the exalted yet inconsequential position of 'Great Leader'. Finding his ministers replaced upon returning from Moscow in September, Taraki attempted to eliminate Amin in a palace gun battle, but the Soviet-approved intrigue failed. Amin was now in full command of the government and held his former chief in custody. The clandestine murder of Taraki in October, coinciding with the return of General Pavlovsky's fact-finding mission to Moscow, further convinced the Kremlin of the intractability of Amin's regime.[59]

At this point contingency plans were proceeding apace -- Pavlovsky had been the commander of the Warsaw Pact forces which invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968 -- yet according to recent Soviet reports, the Politburo was still divided over the course of action to follow. Cautioning against military intervention were Chief of Staff Marshal Nikolai Ogarkov and his deputy, Marshal Sergei Akhromeev, along with KGB chief

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[55]Hyman 101.
[56]Bradsher 152.
[57]Brigot and Roy 38.
[58]Hyman 106.
[59]Collins, Soviet Invasion 66.

Yury Andropov and Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin. Despite this warning about the unsuitability of Afghan soil for Marxist-Leninist political culture, the decision to invade was apparently taken by Brezhnev during a closed session in early December involving only three other individuals, doubtless in unanimous support of the General Secretary. These three officials were Defence Minister Dmitri Ustinov, Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Gromyko, and Mikhail Suslov, Central Committee Secretary in charge of ideology.[60]

According to a report prepared by the Supreme Soviet Committee for Internal Affairs in 1989, three considerations led to the decision to invade. First, Brezhnev and his associates wished to shore up an unstable situation on the Soviet southern flank, in which radical policies ineptly carried out by an unreasoning Afghan dictator were causing chaos which threatened to spill over the border. Secondly, the Soviets were apprehensive of possible American countermoves to recoup lost influence in the region after the fall of the Shah of Iran. Thirdly, over the previous ten months the Afghan regime had made fourteen requests for Soviet military intervention in order to counter the rebel forces.[61] The Soviet leadership could claim that they were responding to a legitimate and long-standing plea for help. The tactical objectives would be limited to controlling individual points -- such as major cities, communications facilities, military outposts, and the arterial roads connecting them -- rather than absolute control over vast areas of the countryside.[62] With these objectives in mind, the Kremlin resolved to complete by late December the final preparations for a winter invasion of Afghanistan.

Preparations for a possible invasion began early in December 1979, when citizens on military reserve status in the Soviet Central Asian republics were suddenly recalled for temporary active duty. In the same period a Soviet regiment was flown into

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[60]Vera Tolz, 'The USSR This Week: Article Says General Staff Opposed Afghan Intervention', Radio Liberty Bulletin 1.13 (31 March 1989): 34.
[61]Solov'eva and Svetlov 19.
[62]'Report on 24th December on Intervention in Afghanistan', BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) SU/0649 (29 December 1989): C/5.

Bagram airbase, subsequently marching north into rebel territory to secure the Salang Pass. This tunnel, completed by the Soviets in 1964, links the north and south slopes of the Hindu Kush mountain range. By now Brezhnev had decided to commit major forces to the area, so the Soviets set about protecting the primary route of an invasion which was to commence the same week.

The invasion by the Soviet 40th Army was carried out through the coordinated efforts of thousands of soldiers and airmen, as well as advisors already in place within the capital. Between 24 and 27 December more than 5,000 Soviet airborne troops were flown into Kabul; Antonov and Ilyushin heavy transports landed at a peak rate of six per hour while delivering men and armoured vehicles on Christmas day.[63] During this time key elements of the Afghan army were cleverly neutralized by Soviet advisers. These advisers ordered the diesel fuel to be siphoned from tanks 'because of a fuel shortage', while in other units, Afghans carried out requests to inventory ammunition and remove batteries for 'winterization'. At 7:00 p.m. on December 27th, combat operations began with coordinated attacks throughout the capital to seize communications centers along with key government buildings, such as the Interior Ministry and police headquarters. Operations culminated in a sweep by KGB special forces of the Darulaman Palace complex seven miles to the southwest, where Amin had taken refuge. Amin was killed in an uneven but fiercely contested battle; by morning the capital was in Soviet hands.[64]

The Russian high command also had prepared for the control of other strategic objectives throughout the country. Four motorized rifle divisions were allocated for securing the main population centers of the country by parallel invasion routes. These time-tested corridors were, in the east, from Termez south along Highway Two through the Salang Tunnel to Kabul; and in the west, from the border town of Kushka

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[63]Kenneth Allard, 'Soviet Airborne Forces and Preemptive Power Projection', Parameters 10.4 (1980): 48.

[64]Edward Girardet, Afghanistan: The Soviet War (London: Croom Helm, 1985) 13.

to Herat, continuing in a broad southeasterly sweep through Farah to Kandahar.[65] In a country without rail lines, armoured vehicles were kept going by a steady stream of fuel lorries, who were themselves supported by special construction battalions laying pipelines along the axes of attack. These pipes, equipped with automatic cut-off valves every hundred yards to limit damage in case of sabotage, were laid down at an initial rate of thirty kilometres a day to keep up with the troops speeding southward.[66]

Armed operations were accompanied by a purge of military and political forces loyal to Amin. The general commanding the Afghan Central Army Corps was executed along with loyalist officers on the night of the coup.[67] In the same evening, a broadcasting station calling itself Radio Kabul transmitted a message by Babrak Karmal declaring the overthrow of Amin and announcing the installation of a new government headed by Karmal. The exiled former ambassador had apparently been chosen by the Soviets to head the new government of Afghanistan, and he duly paid homage to 'Islamic religion, family, folk and national traditions', at the same time denouncing his former opponent Amin as an 'agent of American imperialism'.[68] The radio broadcast was later determined to have originated in Termez on the Soviet side of the border; Karmal entered Kabul no earlier than the following day, escorted by the Soviet 360th Motor Rifle Division.[69]

As the new year began, it appeared that the Red Army had executed a textbook operation. The political opposition had been decapitated; coordinated action on the part of commando forces and mobile armoured infantry demonstrated the capability of the modern Soviet army to accomplish assigned goals efficiently. Soviet detachments worked quickly to seal border crossings with Iran and Pakistan,[70] while the Soviet air

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[65]Mark Urban, War in Afghanistan, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1990) 42.
[66]Equipment description is found in Georgy Bruderer, Afganskaya voina (Frankfurt: Posev, 1985) 35. For rate of construction, see Girardet 15.
[67]Joseph J. Collins, 'War in Afghanistan: the Strategic-Military Context', The Cultural Basis of Afghan Nationalism, eds. Ewan Anderson and Nancy Hatch Dupree (London: Pinter, 1990) 55.
[68]Rand 7-8.
[69]Urban 46.
[70]Joseph J. Collins, 'The Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan: Methods, Motives, and Ramifications', Naval War College Review 33.6 (1980): 55.

force bombed the main roads extending from Kabul toward Kandahar and Jalalabad in order to gain control of these vital byways.[71] Moreover, 'General Winter' was now on the side of the invader. Tribal guerrilla forces, for centuries accustomed to fighting according to seasons and harvests, did not wish to engage the enemy in the bitter cold of January.[72] Nevertheless, official propaganda broadcasts over Radio Kabul by Islamic leaders preaching solidarity with the government could not entirely mask the serious problems facing Babrak Karmal's new cabinet. Afghans were enraged at the sudden shock of invasion; despite the liberalization of government policies, the civil service and the army were soon riddled with defections. This meant that borders designated as 'sealed' on the maps of Soviet commanders were penetrated by streams of men and arms passing from Pakistan to guerrilla-controlled areas. Furthermore, entire sections of the country quickly fell under the nominal control of the rebels. These areas, mainly in the sparsely populated western deserts and central mountains of the Hazara Jat, were never seriously contested by the Soviets throughout the entire period of their presence.[73]

As spring approached, the Soviets found that although their initial objectives -- control of large cities and main highways -- had been achieved, they still could not pacify the countryside. To any of the commanders who knew of it, Prince Gorchakov's warning to the Tsar in 1864 about the dangers of absorbing the Central Asian khanates no doubt echoed ever more insistently throughout 40th Army headquarters in Bagram:

> In order to stop these [incursions] we are compelled to reduce the tribes on our frontier to a more or less complete submission. Once this result is attained they become less troublesome, but in their turn they are exposed to the agression of more distant tribes.[74]

Because of defection from the ranks of the regular Afghan army, the Soviet commander Marshal Sokolov was forced to introduce his own contingency regiments waiting at the

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[71] Brigot and Roy 53.
[72] Girardet 17.
[73] Urban 55.
[74] W. K. Fraser-Tytler, Afghanistan, 3rd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1967) 334.

Soviet border.[75] He would concentrate on cutting the guerrilla supply lines to refugee camps in Pakistan, after which the rebels systematically could be rooted out of their enclaves and destroyed. Otherwise, even the initial gains would be lost to strategic defeat in a classic protracted guerrilla war that the Soviet military chiefs, as we have seen, feared from the beginning.

A succession of combined Soviet-Afghan offensives from Kabul toward the Pakistan border thus marked the opening year of the war, and in many ways characterized the course of the fighting for the following eight years. These relatively large-scale sweeps aimed at securing the Kunar, Jalalabad and Panjsher valleys from which rebel attacks on government outposts took place.[76] The battle plan favored by the Soviets during the first stage of the war involved an initial artillery bombardment of suspected guerrilla strongholds and rebel-controlled towns. An armoured column would then advance, carrying infantrymen who would attempt to engage the enemy in set battles. The result of these campaigns was generally a temporary victory for overwhelming Soviet firepower, followed by a withdrawal and subsequent reoccupation by guerrilla forces of a new series of devastated villages.

These tactics having proved ineffective, in 1981 the Soviets began to use more imagination against their stubborn opponents. Jet fighter-bombers swept over battle areas with increasing regularity, dropping bombs to pin down guerrillas as armoured columns advanced. At the same time, helicopters now delivered elite paratroop units behind resistance emplacements to seal escape routes. The mujahedin would then theoretically be crushed between the infantry and the commandos in hammer-and-anvil tactics. These tactics, however, were not always successful. Artillery support still had to be requested from divisional headquarters, and air support from 40th Army headquarters. This produced long delays and strangled initiative at the lower regimental level. Furthermore, the Soviet conscripts who formed the bulk of the infantry forces

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[75]Urban 59.
[76]David C. Isby, War in a Distant Country: Afghanistan, Invasion and Resistance (London: Arms and Armour, 1989) 25.

were poorly trained and fearful of leaving the relative safety of their armoured personnel carriers to fight a fanatical adversary. Thus many objectives, from Herat in the west to Kunar in the east, switched hands several times during the course of the year, and Kandahar was secured only after heavy Soviet and regular Afghan air raids.[77]

Frustration from inability to control even a quarter of the countryside (and then only during daylight hours) resulted in Soviet implementation of a scorched-earth policy on a wide scale in 1982. This particularly destructive tactic was put into practice in, among other places, the provinces around Kabul, since even the capital could not yet be considered a secure base of operations. In a bid to deprive the resistance forces of operating bases, the Soviets put entire surrounding villages to the torch, destroying newly-harvested crops and centuries-old irrigation canals with equal impunity. Repeated offensives against the Panjsher Valley army of rebel leader Ahmad Shah Masud, campaigns which by now formed a major component of Soviet strategy, were accompanied also by terrible loss to the civilian population and devastation of the economic base.[78]

This scorched-earth policy initially seemed to produce the intended results for the Soviets. The resistance forces in the Panjsher were badly hurt, as the Soviets combined destruction of the infrastructure with improved performance on the battlefield. Jet aircraft pounded the valley with bombs for an entire week before an invasion was mounted. Furthermore, the Red Army now operated with smaller units of highly trained air assault commandos, this time duplicating the hammer and anvil tactic in each of many tiny tributaries branching from the main valley. The mujahedin were forced to retreat temporarily from what had been an impregnable sanctuary. In the spring of 1983, Masud reluctantly negotiated a truce with the Soviets, which

[77]Urban 88.
[78]Brigot and Roy 53-55.

guaranteed peace to the region and safe passage of Soviet convoys travelling on Highway Two.[79]

The cease-fire between Masud and the Soviets lasted only one year. In April 1984 the truce ended when the Soviets invaded the Panjsher Valley with its eighth major offensive, marked by the introduction of high-altitude bombing. The result was a stalemate, although the resistance suffered heavy casualties. During 1984 the fighting also continued unabated in the same areas of strategic interest as before: Kandahar, Herat and Pakhtia. The shooting meanwhile caused fresh concern to Pakistan's leadership as the Russians carried out air raids across the border against Afghan refugee camps. These camps were now overflowing with Afghans forced to flee their villages by Soviet bombings and ground attacks. Furthermore, the Soviets often carried out reprisals against the civilian population in revenge for mujahedin raids on airbases and ammunition depots. These massacres eliminated entire settlements and terrorized the residents of neighbouring valleys and towns into making the difficult trek across the border to Pakistan.[80]

Despite the advances made by the Soviet military in their use of commando special forces, heliborne operations, and close air support, 1985 can be seen as a watershed year on the political front. In April, Mikhail Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party. Within Afghanistan, Dr. Mohammed Najibullah, a Parcham member of aristocratic Pushtun lineage, was now seen as a rising star in the Afghan government. Najibullah, in charge of intelligence operations since the December 1979 coup, had spent the previous five years building a well-trained and motivated security force, and now began to use persuasive means to woo tribes away from the resistance on both sides of the Pakistani-Afghan border. In a general council of Pakistani tribal leaders in Kabul, for example, he and Karmal advanced the cause of the PDPA by playing upon tribal dissatisfactions over unwanted

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[79]Urban 118.
[80]Brigot and Roy 57-60.

competition with Afghan refugees for the cross-border trade in drugs and weapons.[81] Najibullah in fact was appointed General Secretary of the PDPA in May 1986, and Karmal was retired for reasons of health.[82] The new Afghan government pursued a middle course for practical reasons: Gorbachev told Najibullah in a December 1986 meeting in Moscow that sooner or later the young Afghan leader would have to stand without the benefit of the Red Army.[83] Thus, in January 1987, Najibullah unilaterally declared a general cease-fire to usher in his new policy of National Reconciliation.[84]

The core of the resistance was by now a coalition of seven guerrilla organizations of varying ideological stripe nominally controlled from political headquarters in Pakistan. Ahmad Masud was the charismatic and capable regional field commander in the Panjsher Valley for just one of these Peshawar-based groups, the moderate fundamentalist Jamiat-i-Islami party led by Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani.[85] These Afghan resistance groups had never suffered from a lack of volunteers to fight the war, but had always been hampered by a lack of weaponry, as well as poor command and control. Now, thanks to grass-roots political support, Masud could field a regular army in the Panjsher valley with full-time soldiers carrying the latest in captured Soviet weaponry. With varying degrees of success, the guerrillas began to use man-portable launchers to fire Blowpipe and Stinger anti-aircraft missiles at marauding Soviet fighters and helicopters. As the Soviets gradually began to assume a defensive posture, Najibullah would need a vast amount of political as well as military acumen to survive this increasing threat to his regime.

On the ground, the government now relied more heavily upon Afghan troops, although the Russians, led by Lieutenant-General Gromov, the 40th Army

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[81]Urban 181.
[82]Urban 198.
[83]Urban 207.
[84]Anthony Arnold and Rosanne Klass, 'Afghanistan's Communist Party: The Fragmented PDPA', Afghanistan, The Great Game Revisited, ed. Rosanne Klass (New York: Freedom House, 1987) 154-56.
[85]David Isby, Russia's War in Afghanistan (London: Osprey Publishing, 1986) 24. After the fall of the Najibullah regime in 1992, Ahmad Shah Masud became the first Minister of Defence for the Afghan coalition government, and Rabbani became President.

Commander-in-Chief, conducted a successful operation to relieve the garrison at Khost in December 1987. Operation Magistral would prove to be the last major Red Army operation of the war.[86] On 14 April 1988, Afghanistan and Pakistan signed the long-awaited Geneva Accords, which were the fruit of United Nations negotiations dating from 1982. By August, the first phase of the redeployment was completed by bringing troops from outlying provinces into Kabul and Mazar-i-Sarif in the east, and toward Shindand airbase near Herat in the west. There was no question of a general moratorium on combat between the opposing Afghan forces; in the north, for example, Kunduz fell to the resistance just hours after the Soviets left the city heading toward Mazar-i-Sharif. Only with heavy fighting and Russian reinforcements was the city retaken by Najibullah's soldiers. For the Soviets, the retreat was carried out in certain instances with a minimum of fighting due to local negotiations with the mujahedin, such as occurred at Faizabad. But at other locations, such as Kandahar, Soviet units were subjected to mortar attack and threat of ambush during the trek northward.[87] As the last months of the Russian armed presence in Afghanistan drew to a close, Soviet fighter bombers dropped scores of bombs on settlements fringing Highway Two in an effort to protect their convoys. On 15 February 1989, the withdrawal was completed on schedule when Lieutenant-General Gromov walked across the pontoon bridge spanning the Amu Darya River at Termez. Thus ended nine years of active combat by the Red Army in Afghanistan.

What type of indigenous society confronted the Soviet soldier in Afghanistan, and what sort of enemy waited to ambush him from the mountain passes? Neither the resistance nor the regime and its supporters formed homogeneous ethnic, cultural, or linguistic groups. Indeed, the complex mixture of tribal loyalties and familial associations makes pacification of the country as difficult for the various mujahedin armies today as it did for the Russians. The country of Afghanistan forms a single

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[86]Urban 232-35.
[87]Urban 254-55.

entity only at the highest level of abstraction; Islam alone provides the basis for cultural homogeneity amidst a welter of languages and customs. Thus, in order to understand the obstacles which faced the Soviet soldier in combat, it will be useful to briefly investigate the cultural differences within Afghanistan which have produced a fierce tradition of independence among a myriad of indigenous peoples.

The Pushtuns, traditionally occupying southern areas in a curved palm, so to speak, holding the rest of Afghanistan, constitute the largest and most powerful ethnic group with just less than half the total pre-war population of 15 million. Their native language, Pushtu, is the language of government, and their clans have supplied the capital of Afghanistan with its kings ever since the Durrani tribe came to the throne in 1747. Most Pushtuns, however, are small landowners, and approximately one million Pushtuns are nomadic. These wandering clans have herded sheep and goats since ancient times, through periods of peace and war, along ancient routes from southern Afghanistan to the cooler summer pastures on the northern slopes of the Hindu Kush.[88]

The second most numerous and influential segment of society is made up of four million Tajiks. A Persian people, they inhabit a wedge-shaped area in the northwest, split by the Soviet-Afghan border and reaching as far south as Kabul. The Tajiks traditionally are town-dwellers, and their native tongue, a dialect of Persian called Dari, is the language of commerce in Afghanistan.[89] With a significant presence in Kabul, they supply large numbers of employees for the government bureaucracy, although they also work as sharecroppers and artisans in rural areas such as the Panjsher Valley.[90]

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[88]John F. Burns, '"Afghan Nomads" Ancient Ways Unfettered by War', International Herald Tribune 24 May 1990: 1.
[89]Although at least one authority states that the distinction between Farsi and Dari is a purely political one, used by the Soviets to foster a feeling of foreignness among Afghans who might otherwise develop closer ties with the Iranians. See Klass 458.
[90]Alfred Janata, 'Afghanistan: the Ethnic Dimension', in Anderson and Dupree 65.

There are roughly twenty smaller ethnic groups, each with its own language, making up the remaining population of Afghanistan.[91] The one and a half million Uzbeks, one of a number of Turkish peoples divided like the Tajiks by a trans-ethnic border, breed cattle on the plains north of the Hindu Kush. Other Turkish tribes include the Turkmen, Khirgiz, and Kazakhs, with their northern brethren living in Soviet republics. In contrast, the Hazara tribe, occupying the harsh central mountainous regions with a population equal to the Uzbeks, are relegated to the bottom rung of the economic and social ladder in a nation already gripped by grinding poverty. These reputed descendants of Genghis Khan's invaders nowadays hire themselves out as cheap manual labour in the towns, or work as petty tradesmen, proud of their Shia Islamic ties.[92] Other less numerous groups include Aimaq nomads, Persian Farsiwans in western Afghanistan, and the eastern Nuristanis, who with their ginger hair and blue eyes claim their lineage from Alexander the Great's conquering army.[93]

Having lived in a barracks environment sanitized of any religious influence, the Russian soldier was thrust into a world permeated with deeply-held spiritual beliefs. Although these beliefs were not homogeneous, nevertheless they exercised a profound effect on the population this soldier had come to liberate. What are the tenets by which both his allies and enemies lived?

The overwhelming majority of the Afghan population espouses the religion of Islam. All Moslems, whether of the Sunni majority (80% in Afghanistan) or Shia minority sect, manifest their faith through practices known as the five pillars of Islam: the profession of faith that there is but one God, called Allah; prayer five times a day, with exception only for soldiers in battle; almsgiving to the poor; fasting during the month-long festival of Ramadan; and the hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. These commandments, promulgated by Muhammed, the prophet and founder of Islam, propelled Islamic armies across medieval Central Asia and northern Africa. They

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[91]Fredrik Barth, 'Cultural Wellsprings of Resistance in Afghanistan', Klass 189.
[92]Brigot and Roy 7.
[93]Nigel Ryan, A Hitch or Two in Afghanistan (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983) 176.

served also as a shield against the recent invasion of non-believers from the Soviet Union.[94]

Although Sunni Moslems worship without recourse to intermediary priests, there is nevertheless a hieratic structure permeating the religious life of the villages and towns. At the most basic level is the mullah. He is appointed by a majority of village elders to lead prayers and perform baptism, marriage, burial, and children's religious education -- in short, a 'manager of rituals'. Despite his priestly role, folk tales often depict the mullah as an indolent though clever fellow. In fact, his lowly social status is on a par with the village shoemaker, unless he has a primary job, such as farmer, to relieve his dependence on the paltry community chest.[95]

Two institutions, one based on land and the other on personal influence, serve as the remaining traditional bulwarks of rural society. The first involves the malik or headman, who is elected by a gathering of respected village elders to serve as intermediary between the village inhabitants and the civil government in Kabul. Acting as filter of information and influential negotiator, the malik occupies an important position in the eyes of a farmer who owes taxes, or a mother who wants to delay the induction of her son into the army. The second institution is based on the tribe rather than a geographical unit such as the village. At its summit may be found the khan who possesses considerable wealth, generosity, and charisma. With the judicious application of his largesse, he commands the respect of a tribal faction, but must also have a huge progeny, an extensive network of dependent relatives, and a politician's ability to adjudicate disputes. The khan must be seen to protect his people against the encroachment of other tribes, but he must continually maneuver against local competitors in order to maintain his position.[96]

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[94]Dupree, Afghanistan 95-101.

[95]Roy 32-33. Further up the social ladder are the qazi, judges who dispense justice according to their interpretation of Koranic law, and the ulema, or educated clergy. See Janata 66.

[96]Roy 23.

These institutions are neither static nor universal. The three pillars of religion, tribe and village supporting this society are more like tributaries flowing together in ever-changing channels to form one river. Thus a village malik, perhaps not even a member of the dominant tribal faction, may call a meeting of the tribal heads of families to be held quite naturally at the village mosque. Or perhaps a village khan, quite an important man before the war, finds that his influence has been usurped by a mujahed commander.[97] Indeed, the social structure described above does not include sources of external authority such as the Imams of Iran, who exercise spiritual -- and not insignificant political -- influence over the Shia Hazaras and Farsiwans; nor does it encompass the tiny Sikh and Hindu communities, who do not recognize Islamic religious or cultural customs. Moreover, this belief system does not accommodate those who espouse secular ideologies such as Marxism. Yet Afghanistan is still overwhelmingly rural, with high rates of poverty and illiteracy. Significantly, traditions dating back for centuries hold great sway among the present-day populace. Thus these institutions in one way or another affect illiterate rural sharecropper and educated civil servant alike.

Alongside Islamic strictures and village civil hierarchies stand the tenets of a moral and social code of conduct called Pushtunwali, especially pervasive among Pushtuns. The code, rarely mentioned directly by name, is a time-honoured system of values shared to some extent by all Afghans, centered on defence of the homeland, magnanimity, and redress of insult.[98] Indeed, Pushtunwali may be used to sanction a call to arms against other encroaching tribes as well as invading nations; mujahedin soldiers fight against each other as often as they fought the Russians. But adherents of the code must also display hospitality; foreign visitors to Afghanistan are uniform in their praise (and at times exasperation) over the elaborate greetings and immediate offers of food and a place to rest encountered in the countryside.[99] This umbrella of

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[97]Roy 151.

[98]Mohammed Ali, The Afghans (Lahore, Pakistan: Punjab Educational Press, 1965) 21.

[99]For example, see Peregrine Hodson, Under A Sickle Moon (London: Abacus, Sphere Books, 1988) 74.

patriarchal responsibility extends to an enemy who might throw himself on the mercy of his conqueror, or who suffers wounds in combat. During a battle for the strategic Kabul-Jalalabad corridor in 1983, for example, the Soviets reportedly benefitted from Pushtunwali when their hammer-and-anvil tactics went awry. Their main thrust by armoured personnel carriers and tanks was halted by mines and rocket attacks at one end of a valley, while the assault troops forming the would-be 'anvil' were ambushed at the other. Russian helicopters arriving to evacuate the wounded were targeted by snipers, but once on the ground the medics were left in peace to load their stretchers and depart.[100] While it is probably true that the presence of mediating agencies such as khan, malik, or head of family prevents society from dissolving into anarchy, it is also true that the Pushtunwali system is 'neither homogeneous nor consistent', and contains 'inherent perceptual dilemmas and choices of interpretations of these core values.'[101] Thus the common conclusion drawn by outsiders is that the character of the Afghan is riddled with contradictory qualities leading to unpredictable actions. In a succinct picture of 'Pushtunwalee' which might have been written in the present time, Lord Elphinstone wrote of the Afghans in 1815:

> There is no point in the Afgaun character of which it is more difficult to get a clear idea, than the mixture of sympathy and indifference, of generosity and rapacity, which is observable in their conduct to strangers ... So much more do they attend to granting favours than to respecting rights, that the same Afgaun who would plunder a traveller of his cloak, if he had one, would give him a cloak if he had none.[102]

With its complex and contradictory tenets, Pushtunwali seems suited to maintaining the qualities of a warrior, with every adult male required to take up arms instantly against any perceived offence to family, tribe, or country. Perhaps this code, at the cost of sometimes fratricidal conflict, has guaranteed a measure of autonomy to tribes historically located at the crossroads of so many invading armies. At the same time, a

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[100]Louis Dupree, 'Cultural Changes Among the Mujahidin and Muhajerin', The Tragedy of Afghanistan, eds. Bo Huldt and Erland Jansson (London: Croom Helm, 1988) 28. The author notes, however, that this behaviour was an exception.
[101]Inger W. Boesen, 'Honour in Exile: Continuity and Change Among Afghan Refugees', in Anderson and Dupree 164.
[102]Elphinstone 228.

Soviet commander with sufficient knowledge and patience might attempt to exploit these traditions for his own benefit.

What sort of soldier was produced by this cultural and religious tradition? The mujahedin, or 'warriors of God', who faced the Soviet tanks were mostly peasants, shepherds and farmers.[103] Their concept of Afghan nationhood is a vision of Islamic communities traditionally ruled by the Amir of Kabul, for nine years threatened by the infidel Russians.[104] The fact that the Soviets professed no belief in God, and originated from across the border, transformed this conflict into a jihad, or holy war, in contrast to the age-old seasonal fighting for glory, property, or honour among tribes. To kill an infidel or die in battle against him assures the faithful Moslem a place in heaven.[105] Moreover, a young man who faced conscription into the regular Afghan army, whose family perhaps had been killed and small farm devastated, could find sufficient motivation in the here and now to volunteer. Besides, in the eyes of more than one young combatant, fighting was considerably more manly than raising sheep.[106]

For most of the war, the rebels remained fragmented into small groups owing allegiance to their local military commanders. This commander, by virtue of his courage and tactical ability -- and perhaps, a sizeable tract of land which he owned -- directed military operations and recruiting. Together with a local emir in charge of civil administration and tax collecting, and supported by a committee of village elders, he was responsible for the defence and economy of the immediate area. As emigration and war took their toll, this administrative structure supplanted the traditional village hierarchies in regions controlled by the mujahedin.[107] Moreover, martial talents and bravery in battle also determined social status for males throughout the country.

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[103]Brigot and Roy 89.
[104]Roy 17.
[105]Roy 176-80.
[106]Brigot and Roy 89.
[107]Brigot and Roy 92-93.

But actual combat affected only a fraction of the land at any one time. The poet Louis Simpson described the primary job of the World War One infantryman as simply 'being shelled';[108] in like manner, Olivier Roy suggests that the most important activity of a mujahedin unit in the field was 'the selection of night sentries'.[109] An average unit of forty full-time soldiers living communally in a village barracks occupied their time with target practice, routine patrols of the local area, with only occasional attacks on nearby government posts or armoured columns moving along the main roads. During the frequent lulls, the mujahedin were responsible for regulating commercial traffic through their area and granting right of passage to travellers. Of course, relations with civilian communities depended on the ability of the commander to keep his troops in check. Many areas were victimized by soldiers who felt justified in 'requisitioning' supplies from a helpless populace.[110]

When it came to fighting, the mujahedin displayed remarkable aloofnesss toward such traditional military concerns as planning and protocol. Combat operations usually surprised their opponents, not least because the rebels themselves rarely thought through these forays in advance of their execution. Although the commander was the initiator and adjudicator of last recourse in tactical decisions, plans would be hammered out and ratified by the entire group only shortly before the attack, and executed with little care for detail. Furthermore, unlike most armies, niceties of formal military rank were superfluous, although some organizations paid lip service to enlisted and officer ranks.[111] Fear of superior officers was not necessary to motivate these armies of God.

In a country with no significant industrial base, how did the resistance warrior arm himself? Rifles and rocket launchers from Egypt, Israel and China would be purchased with American money through the mediation of political fronts in Pakistan and shipped to Karachi. From there a Pakistani brigadier general was in charge of

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[108]Paul Fussel, The Great War in Modern Memory (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1975) 46.
[109] Roy 175.
[110]Brigot and Roy 92.
[111]Roy 172-76.

overland transportation of mujahedin arms to Peshawar. Distribution depots just outside of Peshawar were maintained by each of the seven major guerrilla organizations, and supplied by nightly grocery truck deliveries of guns and ammunition. At this stage, each group would direct the redistribution of its own cache by whatever mode of transportation was available to cross the border: lorry and jeep, mule and camel, or by soldiers making the trek on foot to their field units.[112] Threading through a dangerous maze of mountain passes and rocky desert trails, this logistical operation theoretically put a 12.7 mm DshK ('dashaka') heavy machine gun into the hands of a resistance fighter in northern Afghanistan after a four-week trip by two dozen foot soldiers. If this anti-aircraft weapon were part of a large convoy, it would be shipped with a ten-ton payload carried by up to one hundred horses. In actuality, however, three out of four guns never reached the battle fronts. Instead, they were siphoned off for profit at every opportunity along the way from the port of Karachi to the Afghan border. They were then subject to extortionist 'taxes' by rival mujahedin groups, or by any armed contingent more powerful than the convoy it stopped -- not to mention attack by Soviet forces.[113] Consequently, most resistance units were poorly equipped, especially at the outset of the war. Typical arsenals were decidedly eclectic, from the nineteenth-century British Lee-Enfield breech-loading rifle to perhaps a recently captured Soviet AK-74 semi-automatic assault weapon. But even when equipment was obtained, learning to use and maintain it was yet another problem. Many of the soldiers had absolutely no prior contact with any technology more complex than that required for subsistence farming, leading one Western observer to note, 'you could give an Afghan a cigarette lighter and he wouldn't know how to use it.'[114] Lacking firing tubes, for example, the rebels were content to set rockets against a stone and launch them in the general direction of the enemy by means of a nine-volt battery

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[112]Jan Goodwin, Caught in the Crossfire (London: Futura, 1987) 45.
[113]Roy 186-87.
[114]Urban 138.

and electrical wires.[115] Needless to say, damage to government posts caused by these attacks was more psychological than physical.

Deprived of the firepower necessary to mount a sustained strategic offensive, the main tactics used by the mujahedin against the Soviets were ambushes against mobile targets, and sieges against small enemy outposts. Favourite mobile targets were resupply columns of fuel lorries. These columns could be stopped by mines planted across the road at a site suitable for ambush, after which rebel soldiers would charge under cover of sniper fire, mortar and rocket attack. Heavy machine guns served as defence against helicopter gunships. Since Soviet convoys were protected by armoured personnel carriers, the rebels were content to knock out one or two vehicles before retreating, and the Soviets were usually loath to pursue. Against government outposts, on the other hand, the resistance could lay seige to a small camp by surrounding it and peppering it with mortar fire. Reinforcements were interdicted by mining the road leading to the outpost.[116]

As in any guerrilla war, much of the tactical manoeuvering was dependent on political considerations. Thus the terms 'hostile' and 'friendly' when applied to the Afghans turned out to be maddeningly interchangeable for Soviet officers attempting an operation. Successful attacks by the mujahedin against Kabul regime outposts ended in mass defection by Afghan conscripts more often than outright military victory. One mujahed was quoted as saying, only half in jest, that the protective minefields surrounding such posts were planted as much to 'keep them in as to keep us out.'[117] In fact, after the first few years of the war, the mujahedin did not encourage defections among disgruntled government conscripts, preferring them to remain within the army as spies and clandestine suppliers of arms. In an accommodation to mutual political advantage, informal treaties were often temporarily arranged between the local resistance commander and his Kabul army counterpart. In exchange for a surreptitious

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[115]Goodwin 89.
[116]Bruderer 31-33.
[117]Hodson 93.

flow of weapons from an outpost commander, the mujahedin allowed his supply convoys to come and go without hindrance, only occasionally launching 'symbolic' attacks on the site.[118]

As the war continued, however, certain mujahedin troops became better trained and much more willing to strike at even well-protected Soviet targets. Western journalists especially singled out Shah Masud for his determined effort to build a regular professional army in the Panjsher Valley, an area vital to control of the Salang Pass and Highway Two by which the Soviets resupplied the capital. Masud divided his forces into two types of units. The first was composed of lightly-armed paramilitary reserves from the local communities who could guarantee security for their villages and be summoned for defensive operations. The second type of unit was made up of trained professionals who were highly mobile and could be massed for attack in areas and at times of Masud's choosing.[119] These elite units each had thirty men with a full complement of rifles, grenade launchers, and heavy machine guns. In contrast to the typical Afghan leather sandal and ten-foot long turban cloth, their commanders' uniforms included Bulgarian boots from the Kabul bazaar and captured Soviet fur caps. At Masud's directive, these men worked closely with designated unit 'political commissars' to ensure smooth civil-military relations.[120] And unlike the usual impromptu style of most rebel attacks, Masud's successful 1987 operation against a government post in Kalafghan displayed the earmarks of a professional military organization: political groundwork prepared among the local populace, prior intelligence gathering to discover from recent defectors the disposition of enemy weapons and minefields, and concentration of forces.[121]

Against this opponent, the Soviets initially deployed an army which apparently was tailored to counter the threat posed by NATO forces in Europe, but the weapons

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[118]Roy 125.
[119]Roy 181-82.
[120]Ryan 151.
[121]Isby, War in a Distant Country 42.

wielded by the Russian soldier evolved throughout the decade. After the first few years, the infantryman's standard weapon became the reliable AK-74 assault rifle; soldiers preferred a smaller 'cut-down' version of the weapon which was handier to use in the confines of an armoured personnel carrier. In addition, a grenade launcher could be fitted onto the rifle, allowing the individual private to provide his own artillery support. Body armour made from composite plastic material gave protection against enemy fire.[122] Likewise, extra armour plating was attached to tanks, and smoke grenade launchers were added after 1982.[123] For the infantryman, an array of armoured vehicles was introduced over the course of the conflict in order better to protect him. The original BMP (boevaya mashina pekhoty) infantry fighting vehicle and BTR (bronetransporter) armoured personnel carrier were too large for narrow mountain trails, and so were increasingly relegated to patrols within heavily guarded cities, or were transformed into communications and command vehicles which served as mobile field headquarters. In combat, they were superseded by the BMD (boevaya mashina desantnika) assault vehicle, a smaller, air-droppable, better protected vehicle used especially by airborne troops.[124] All of these carriers had heavy machine guns mounted over the armoured roof, and some carried missiles on launch rails along the sides.[125]

Combat skills also improved, as the lessons of a new type of fighting were taught to newcomers in increasingly formal programmes. Instead of several weeks' basic training, which sufficed for the first few years of the war, soldiers now received up to six months of instruction in their specialty before arriving in Afghanistan. Beginning in 1982, for instance, soldiers practiced search and destroy operations against mock Afghan villages set up in Ashkhabad. Because of the dangers of vehicle

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[122]Anthony H. Cordesman and Abraham R. Wagner, The Afghan and Falklands Conflicts, vol. 3 of The Lessons of Modern War (London: Mansell Publishing, 1990) 140-41.
[123]Isby, Russia's War in Afghanistan 10.
[124]Isby, War in a Distant Country 67.
[125]Cordesman and Wagner 152. The larger BMPs and BTRs carry up to 16 infantrymen plus a crew of two, while the smaller BMDs and APCs (armoured personnel carriers) carry six infantrymen plus a crew of three.

breakdown and enemy ambush, lorry drivers were given extra maintenance and driver training as well.[126] Most importantly, the Soviets gradually came to deploy well-trained and highly motivated heliborne forces (voenno-vozdushnye desantniki, or VDV) for almost all their combat operations, leaving large-scale sweeps to the Afghan regular army. The elite status of these Soviet volunteer paratroopers is highlighted by their distinctive light-blue striped T-shirt.[127] Starting in 1983, other elite troops included special purpose (Spetsnaz) forces for sabotage, espionage, and reprisal assassinations; and designated reconnaissance troops (razvedchiki) attached to regular motorized rifle divisions and airborne divisions.[128] These forces, combined with the use of Mi-24 attack helicopters, provided a formidable opponent for the Afghan resistance.

Service in Afghanistan for the Soviet soldier, or 'afganets' as he came to be known, had two unforgiving constants besides the enemy: extreme temperatures and difficult terrain. Over three-quarters of the countryside, especially in the south and west, is semi-arid or barren desert. This led to a constant preoccupation with water once the soldier deployed to the field; troops also suffered from heat exhaustion inside notoriously cramped and poorly ventilated tanks and armoured personnel vehicles.[129] Providing a contrast to the arid plains is the massive Hindu Kush mountain range stretching across Afghanistan from the northeast to the southwest, with rocky, snow-covered peaks cresting above five thousand metres. Beautiful from a distance, this mountain range (whose name means 'Death to the Hindus') proved to be a formidable opponent for Russian soldiers, many of whom had never seen any hills higher than the Urals. Rocky crevasses not only provided shelter for mujahedin camouflaged under

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[126]Cordesman and Wagner 120.

[127]The striped T-shirt (tel'nyashka) for paratroopers was introduced by Army General Vasily Fillipovich Margelov, who, as commander of a naval infantry regiment during the Great Patriotic War, was lucky enough to survive a bullet wound. He kept his bullet-pierced T-shirt as a talisman, and later introduced the naval-style shirt as standard wear for all paratroopers. See Graham H. Turbiville, Jr., 'Airborne Troops', in D. Jones 257.

[128]Scott R. McMichael, Stumbling Bear (London: Brassey's, 1991) 66-67. Incidentally, McMichael states that despite the training, perhaps only two or three actual parachute drops were carried out during the war. Instead, troops were landed in drop zones by helicopter.

[129]Cordesman and Wagner 148.

sand-coloured shawls, and who rained down everything from landslides to mortar shells on the hapless Soviet convoys, but also caused considerable problems for tanks and artillery trying to shoot at elevated targets.[130] Besides, steep terrain was extremely rough on engine clutches and tank treads, and doubled the consumption of coolant and petrol.[131]

Was this a new type of warfare for the Russians? Valid comparisons have been drawn with the nineteenth-century conquest of the Caucasus,[132] and the suppression of the Basmachi Rebellion in the 1920s.[133] Another answer may be found from an unexpected quarter in a brief examination of German accounts describing Soviet operations during World War Two.[134] The Soviets in Afghanistan realized that they were fighting illiterate foot soldiers who were inspired by the religious tenets of Islam; this is similar to impressions gained by Wehrmacht officers fighting in the Soviet Union, who called the Russian character 'primitive and unassuming', but driven by a 'spiritual awakening through communism'.[135] A Soviet soldier's diary entry for 17 May 1980 mentions the serious wounding of two Soviets by a mujahed disguised as an Afghan government soldier;[136] the Germans observed that 'dishonesty and attempts at deception by individual Russian soldiers such as ... wearing German uniforms, were readily employed tactics.'[137] In Afghanistan, the mujahedin seemed to exist on minimal supplies, whereas the Soviet soldiers were continually afflicted with diseases from hepatitis to dysentery.[138] To the Germans, however, the 'Russian soldier was virtually immune to seasonal and terrain difficulties' and the 'equipment carried by all

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[130]Hodson 158.

[131]Cordesman and Wagner 148.

[132]For example, see Paul B. Henze, 'Fire and Sword in the Caucasus: The 19th Century Resistance of the North Caucasian Mountaineers', Central Asian Survey 2.1 (1983): 5-44.

[133]For example, see Marie Broxup, 'The Basmachi', Central Asian Survey 2.1 (1983): 57-81.

[134]United States Army, Center of Military History, Russian Combat Methods in World War II, facsimile ed., Publication 104-12 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1988).

[135]Russian Combat Methods 3-4.

[136]Evgeny Finogeev, 'Iz dnevnika', Afganistan bolit v moei dushe, ed. Petr Tkachenko (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1990) 84.

[137]Russian Combat Methods 7.

[138]Cordesman and Wagner 70.

Germans was often discarded by the Russian infantryman as non-essential.'[139] The Russian colloquially called the mujahedin 'ghosts' (dukhi) because of their seeming ability to arise from and disappear into thin air. 'Our troops began to use the name 'dukhi'', said one observer. 'And there was not even a shade of irony in that term: the enemy tried to make himself invisible, and more often than not he succeeded.'[140] Compare the Nazi observation:

> Wherever the terrain was considered impassable, but was still kept under close observation to be doubly safe -- just there the Russian infiltrated. He was suddenly there in substantial numbers and had already vanished into the earth. Nobody had seen a thing. Because of the drawn-out German defence fronts, it was no particular art to steal between the widely separated strong points, but it was always a surprise when, despite all watchfulness during the night, the Germans found the next morning that strong Russian units fully equipped with weapons and ammunition had assembled and dug in far behind the front. These operations were executed with unbelievable skill, completely noiseless and almost always without a struggle. It was a very profitable technique which succeeded in hundreds of cases and gained the Russians great advantages.[141]

The Soviets in Afghanistan were sorely pressed due to mine warfare, in which the mujahedin used a variety of deadly ploys and devices, among which were hard-to-detect handmade mines, and sophisticated fields of directional mines linked by wire.[142] The Germans had the same complaints. The Russian soldier employed

> wooden box mines which could not be detected by the standard mine detectors ... remote (radio) control mines ... [The Russian soldier] attached demolition charges with push-pull igniters to abandoned field kitchens, weapons, corpses, and tombstones; he connected explosive charges to doors, windows, or stoves in the winter; he installed pressure mines under stairs and floors, and booby-trapped abandoned trucks and other equipment.[143]

More similarities exist between the two wars: German officers noted that small groups of Russian partisans concentrated on destroying fuel and ammunition dumps, mining highways, and attacking lorry convoys.[144] All German traffic was necessarily halted at

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[139] Russian Combat Methods 17, 19.

[140] Viktor Verstakov, 'Allakh Akbar', Zvezda nad gorodom Kabulom, ed. A. P. Zhitnukhin (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1990) 144-45.

[141] Russian Combat Methods 26.

[142] Viktor Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1991) 137.

[143] Russian Combat Methods 60-61.

[144] Russian Combat Methods 105.

night, and only heavily protected daylight convoys were authorized. Additionally, so merciless were the Communist guerrillas that 'Russian civilians often requested [the Germans to provide] protection from Red partisans.'[145] These observations have their counterparts in identical mujahedin tactics, Soviet convoy procedures, and Soviet protection given to pro-regime villages against mujahedin reprisals. And the battle was not restricted to Communists fighting Nazis in World War Two; Poles fought Ukrainians, clandestine Czech and Jewish units carried out guerrilla operations, and members of the Ukrainian Nationalist Movement fought both Germans and Russians at different times.[146] These fragmented political and ethnic rivalries correspond to the partisan fighting among the various Afghan nationalities and ideological groupings. Thus it seems that the type of war being waged in Afghanistan was not new to the Soviet Army; their role within that conflict, however, had changed diametrically.

One final historical note should be mentioned at the outset concerning historical precedents for the Soviet-Afghan War. Frank Ellis suggests that Soviet veterans called themselves 'afgantsy' out of respect for their adversaries.[147] I would suggest an alternative hypothesis, for several reasons. First of all, the soldiers never called their opponents 'afgantsy'. Rather, they used pejoritive terms such as 'bandits' (dushmany, bandity) or 'beards' (borodatye). Even the most popular term, 'ghosts' (dukhi) was not complimentary, reflected by the use of that name for junior inexperienced troops. Secondly, patriotic soldiers called themselves 'afgantsy' as early as the first few months of the intervention, before combat action became widespread.[148] Moreover, in subsequent fiction, poetry, publitsistika, or in personal conversation, I have found little veneration or empathy expressed by Soviet soldiers toward their adversaries. Rather, it seems that the name 'afgantsy' came to identify Soviet veterans much as the term

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[145]Russian Combat Methods 107.
[146]Russian Combat Methods 111.
[147]Norman John (Frank) Ellis, 'Vasiliy Grossman, The Genesis and Evolution of Heresy', diss., Bristol University, 1990, 58. As general background to my thesis, I have benefitted greatly from Ellis's excellent overview of Soviet World War Two literature.
[148]Ninel' Strel'stova, Vozvrashchenie iz Afganistana (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1990) 87, citing a soldier who arrived in April 1980.

'kavkaztsy' was used by Lermontov to connote the Imperial Russian troops who served in the Caucasus during the nineteenth century.[149] That is, the soldiers were identified by the geographical area in which they fought, and later came to live, as an occupying army. The use of a geographical appellation also serves to mark the soldiers of each conflict as 'outsiders', it seems, in contrast to, for example, World War Two veterans. Lermontov's 1841 physiological sketch 'Kavkazets' notes:

> The kavkazets is a creature half-Russian, half-Asian; an inclination toward Eastern customs prevails in him, although he is loath to practice them when in the presence of outsiders, which to him means anyone coming from Russia.[150]

Likewise, the term 'afganets' is associated with social protest; now proudly worn, but earlier despised by some veterans (one man observed, 'They call us 'afgantsy', a foreign name, like a mark.'[151]) -- yet in each case used to mark separateness rather than connection to the general population at home. Thus, the use of geographical names seems to signify alien values: in the case of the 'kavkazets', these were cultural values, absorbed from serving over long periods of time in the Caucasus, whereas for the 'afganets', these would be alien social and political values, engendered from combat duty in a war which was unpublicized at home out of shame.[152] In any case, these 'foreign' values are distinguished only in a domestic context, and have nothing to do with the aspirations of the enemy soldier, even though his fighting ability might be respected.

Russian expansion into Central Asia, spanning five centuries, reached its zenith during this war. In some ways, the Soviet-Afghan conflict may be looked upon as a natural progression, beginning with imperial trade interests and developing into a perceived geopolitical imperative at the end of the Soviet period. In another light, the

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[149]'Kavkazets', Lermontovskaya entsiklopediya, ed. V. A. Manuilov (Moscow: Sovetskaya entsiklopediya, 1981) 213.

[150]My translation is from D. J. Richards, notes, Geroi nashego vremeni, by M. Yu. Lermontov (Letchworth, Hertfordshire: Bradda Books, 1974) 172-73.

[151]Svetlana Aleksievich, 'Tsinkovye mal'chiki', Druzhba narodov 7 (1990): 12.

[152]As if to underscore this subversive implication, Lermontov's sketch was originally suppressed by the censors -- as was any mention of the term 'afganets' during most of the Afghan War.

invasion was an unprecedented projection of military force into an area of which the Russians had traditionally been wary. In any case, over the course of nine years, the mujahedin had persevered against the most difficult odds, as their ancestors had against earlier invasions. And in certain instances, the resistance had fashioned itself into a guerrilla army capable of strategic action, coordinating attacks between forces of different ethnic groups and political persuasions. The Soviets also attempted to adjust to their new strategic role as occupiers, as well as to their new tactical situation in unexpected surroundings. In fact, in certain ways, as has been argued, the armies reversed their initial tactics. The Soviets began to employ guerrilla tactics: decentralized command; small-unit operations; improvised uniforms, equipment, and weaponry. Conversely, the mujahedin fighters gradually adopted the attributes of a professional army: centralized command; operations involving combined arms and the strategic coordination of various units; full-time soldiers; and training with modern high-technology weaponry. Unfortunately for the Russians, this tactical situation merely reflected their strategic failure, as they still found themselves fighting an enemy who was difficult to find, and could rarely be trapped. It is this determined foe and this harsh environment which provide the backdrop to Soviet literature about the war.

Chapter Two

Political Constraints and Glasnost

This chapter traces political constraints placed on discussions of the Afghan War in official Soviet reportage, fiction, and poetry, from the initial intervention of Soviet troops in December 1979 to the fall of the Soviet-backed Najibullah regime in 1992. The first section of this chapter documents the strict censorship which predominated until 1984. Initial reportage and fictional accounts consisted of coverage of the non-combat activities of the Soviet contingent, and polemical counter-attacks against western media dispatches. The second section charts a transitional period of pro-regime propaganda which predominated until 1987. This period was characterized by publicity about the heroic exploits of Soviet soldiers in battle; official writers working within diverse genres pursued the common theme of justifying continued Soviet losses in a protracted war. The third section deals with the emergence of negative publicity in the era of glasnost, lasting until the present day. This third period, beginning in 1987, witnessed the emergence of revisionist writers who described events and expressed opinions with a freedom which previously had been politically unacceptable in the official press. The revisionists either contradicted Party ideology in their works, or wrote poems and stories which were entirely decoupled from politics. The final section treats nascent Soviet literary criticism of Afghan war literature. This framework will provide a general context for subsequent chapters which analyze specific works of reportage, poetry, and prose.

The first year of occupation (1980) was characterized in print by heavily censored journalistic accounts. Gennady Bocharov, correspondent for Literaturnaya gazeta, provides an account of the restrictions facing Soviet reporters in Afghanistan during these early years. According to Bocharev, Mikhail Suslov, the Central Committee Secretary in charge of ideological matters, issued an order at the outset concerning two basic 'facts' which were never to be contradicted: first, that Soviet

forces arrived in Kabul at the legal request of the lawfully constituted Afghan government; and second, that Soviet soldiers did not engage in offensive combat operations. Bocharov claims to have been present when the first 'fact' was created before his very eyes by a Central Committee representative in the Kabul embassy conference room, who invented the 'fourteen requests' for military intervention made by the Afghan regime to the Soviet government. Concerning the second 'fact', Bocharov's censor for the Moscow press told him in the initial stages of the war that a maximum of four articles in six months were allowed to contain references to wounded Soviet soldiers, and that mention of deaths was absolutely proscribed. Enforcement was rigid; Leonid Mironov, Pravda correspondent, questioned the Party apparatus about justification for the initial intervention, and was forced to resign. Bocharov relates how all stories were generated by 'social orders' relayed by the political authorities to the journalists, and how all dispatches were scrupulously edited and cleared at numerous levels, culminating in final clearance by the central military censor and the Glavlit censor in Moscow.[1] In the early years, reporters were not allowed to refer to soedinenie (a generic term for the largest tactical unit, usually a division) or polk (the smaller regiment). They could only use the word podrazdelenie (sub-unit).[2] Journalists were not allowed to identify the 40th Army in print, nor were they permitted to name its commanders.[3] Otherwise, references to soldiers seem to have been limited to occasional mention of peaceful activities, such as when troops were described building tables and benches for villagers whose property had been destroyed by Afghan rebels.[4] Krasnaya zvezda, the official Soviet army newspaper, apparently maintained

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[1]Gennady Bocharov, Russian Roulette (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990) 51-55.
[2]Viktor Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 305. All subsequent references citing Verstakov will refer to Afganskii dnevnik (1991) unless otherwise stated.
[3]Verstakov 173-75.
[4]Aaron Trehub, 'Soviet Press Coverage of the War in Afghanistan: From Cheerleading to Disenchantment', Radio Liberty Bulletin 1.10 (1989): 1. I could find no mention of such friendly activities in a partial search of various official newspapers, but I have found numerous secondary references to accounts of Soviet military doctors delivering Afghan babies, and Soviet soldiers building kindergartens and planting trees. These propagandistic accounts seem to comprise a common -- and bitter -- memory for many Soviets. See, for example, Strel'tsova 108.

a ban on any mention of combat forces, instead taking refuge in stock phrases such as 'assistance in various spheres', or gratitude toward the 'Soviet people'.[5]

This official silence extended initially only to Soviet army involvement in the fighting, not to internecine bloodshed among Afghan adversaries. In fact, Literaturnaya gazeta pressed home a polemical campaign against the mujahedin from the beginning by publishing articles detailing enemy attacks on government supporters and western complicity in the fighting.[6] Aleksandr Prokhanov, journalist and writer, made his first contributions to this campaign with two reports from Kabul detailing atrocities committed by 'bandits' under the guidance of American, Chinese and Pakistani military advisers. In telegraphic sentences, Prokhanov decried the violence as the work of a small minority of terrorists, but was prophetic in his evaluation of the enemy's determination: 'We will not hide the facts: the enemy is neither weak, nor foolish, nor uncommitted ... he is ready to fight to the end.' His highly partisan and colourful articles contained a prognosis for the ultimate victory of 'the people' against 'bandits' motivated by financial profit and Islamic fundamentalism.[7] Prokhanov followed with at least four more reports by the end of the year detailing actions of the regular Afghan army against the enemy and refuting claims by western news dispatches of unilateral Soviet occupation.[8]

The Soviet government also enlisted the political support of its official poets and writers of fiction. As early as January 1980, Literaturnaya gazeta justified the intervention with an article by the Tajik poet Mumin Kanoat. Expressing solidarity with his literary and ethnic brethren across the border, Kanoat quoted his own political

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[5]For example, see 'Na strazhe interesov mira i bezopasnosti', Krasnaya zvezda 19 Oct. 1980: 3, and 'Svidetel'stvo nepokolebimoi druzhby', Krasnaya zvezda 22 Oct. 1980: 3.

[6]For example, see Iona Andronov, 'S kleimom sdelano v SShA', Literaturnaya gazeta 23 Jan. 1980: 9; 'Afganskii urok "soldatom udachi"', 20 May 1981: 9; 'Shag za shagom k shtabu', 20 Jan. 1982: 14; 'Razboiniki -- gruppovoi portret iz Pakistana', 2 June 82: 14-15.

[7]Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Chto tvoryat bandity', Literaturnaya gazeta 27 Feb. 1980: 9; and 'Kabul: Kontrrevolyutsiya ne proshla', 5 March 1980: 14.

[8]Aleksandr Prokhanov, "Soldaty revolyutsii', Literaturnaya gazeta 16 April 1980: 14; 'Edinye v revolyutsii', 7 May 1980: 14; 'Vybor -- revolyutsiya!', 18 June 1980: 14; 'Pobedy trudnyi put", 24 Dec. 1980: 9; 'Razgromlena banda', 7 Jan. 1981: 1; 'Plemena i puli', 28 Jan. 1981: 9; 'Za plugom', 11 Feb. 1981: 15.

verse in support of the Afghan April Revolution, and twice invoked Leonid Brezhnev in a style reminiscent of Stalinist-era propaganda.[9] Moreover, during this first year the Party did not neglect to exercise political control in Kabul by means of organizational work. As early as the second week after the coup, Literaturnaya gazeta quoted an Afghan poet, a Kabul newspaper editor, and an Islamic mullah in support of the invasion.[10] In July 1980, Yury Verchenko, the Organizational Secretary of the USSR Union of Writers, began holding meetings with a leading official writer of the Afghan regime, and by autumn, the newly created Afghan Union of Writers held its first Congress in Kabul.[11] The presence of Georgy Markov, Union First Secretary, and Chingiz Aitmatov, Secretary of the Union of Writers Directorate and internationally recognized writer, at meetings between representatives of the two Unions provided legitimacy for both the invasion and the subsequent mirror-image reorganization of official Afghan cultural activities.[12] For obvious reasons, no mention was made of Andrei Sakharov's 17 January 1980 condemnation of the invasion, nor of his subsequent internal exile.

Yet during the first year of war, the Union of Writers apparently was not called upon to render artistic support. The Fifth Congress of Writers of the RSFSR, held in December 1980, provides evidence of Moscow's unwillingness to allow writers to acknowledge the role of combat forces in Afghanistan. Major General Nikolai Smorigo's address on the topic of military prose made reference to inspiration provided by 'the first years of revolution, and the civil war, and the Great Fatherland War', but concluded only with 'contemporary army life', omitting any specific reference to the war in Afghanistan. The general also outlined official Party views on the artistic treatment of military themes. Noting a 'certain timidity' on the part of writers covering

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[9]Mumin Kanoat, 'Afganistan: shagi revolyutsii', Literaturnaya gazeta 30 Jan. 1980: 1.
[10]Yu. Kornilov, 'Na strazhe zavoevannii revolyutsii', Literaturnaya gazeta 9 Jan. 1980: 9.
[11]'Druzheskaya vstrecha', Literaturnaya gazeta 16 July 1980: 1; Ravil' Musin, 'Afganistan: perom i vintovkoi', 15 Oct. 1980: 15; 'V sekretariate pravleniya SP SSSR', 22 Oct. 1980: 3.
[12]'Schast'e serdechnoi druzhby', Literaturnaya gazeta 19 Nov. 1980: 15; 'Druzheskaya vstrecha', 3 Dec. 1980: 3.

the modern military, he stated that readers wanted themes based on the 'romance of military service.'[13] Yet his list of topics deemed suitable for contemporary works, though including such standard fare as the demands of new technology on modern warriors, made no mention of combat. In a subsequent address to the Congress, World War Two veteran and poet Yuliya Drunina stressed the importance of credibility in writing about combat. Young writers, for example, were advised to avoid anachronisms such as placing modern 1970s weaponry in the context of the Great Patriotic War. She also made the comment, 'I think that even Tolstoy would not have written about war as he did, if he had not personally participated in the Crimean campaign or fought at the Sevastopol bastion.' This observation would seem to encourage contemporary soldiers to write about the conflict in Afghanistan.[14] Instead, calls for realistic detail wrapped in the mantle of romantic themes signalled nothing more than continued official endorsement of socialist realism, and then only if restricted to the Great Patriotic War, which formed the context of Drunina's remarks. The fighting in Afghanistan clearly remained officially out of bounds as a legitimate topic for prose and poetry.[15]

By 1981, however, press reports gradually acknowledged the role of Soviet combat forces in the region, if only in oblique fashion. After a decade of benign neglect, for example, the topic of mountain warfare in combat exercises suddenly became extremely popular in military journals.[16] Articles pointedly ceased to draw on any experiences after the date of the introduction of Soviet troops into Afghanistan, however, and referred to such past experiences as the Eastern Carpathian operations in World War Two, or conditions in the 'Caucasus military district'.[17] Pravda first hinted

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[13]Pyatyi s"ezd pisatelei RSFSR 9-12 dekabrya 1980 (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1982) 182-84.
[14]Pyatyi s"ezd 205-06.
[15]Eight years later, Drunina would write her own poetry about the Afghan War. She committed suicide in 1991.
[16]Douglas M. Hart, 'Low Intensity Conflict in Afghanistan: The Soviet View', Survival 24. 2 (1982): 61.
[17]See Lieutenant General V. Kozhbakhteyev, 'Razvitie taktiki deistvii voisk v gorno-lesistoi mestnosti (1946-1980 gg.)', Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal 2 (1981): 36-43; and Colonel K. Bregman, 'Umelym -- gory ne pomekha', Voennyi vestnik 2 (1981): 48-49.

at actual danger to Russian soldiers with a mosaic of articles published in 1981 on the third anniversary of the Afghan April Revolution. One dispatch described the devastation wrought by mujahedin attacks.[18] Babrak Karmal, the Afghan leader, additionally accused 'hirelings of international imperialists burning mosques, schools, hospitals, and killing our fathers, brothers, sisters and children'.[19] This, together with earlier comments that 'as soon as interference in our internal affairs ceases, the limited contingent of Soviet forces will return to their peace-loving country', clearly implied that Soviet troops were participating in combat.[20] In September 1981, Krasnaya zvezda finally made one of the first official references to a Soviet soldier killed in action, albeit a non-combatant military interpreter serving with an Afghan unit near the Pakistani border.[21]

After the first year, this slow thaw in the official press was simultaneously accompanied by the emergence of fiction and poetry about the war. In April 1981 Literaturnaya gazeta published an excerpt from Aleksandr Prokhanov's novel 'Derevo v tsentre Kabula' ('A Tree in the Centre of Kabul') set in Afghanistan.[22] Mirroring the constraints placed on press dispatches, this excerpt treats only the intra-Afghan political struggle. Even though the selection does not describe Soviet troops actually taking part in combat missions, however, it did introduce the subject as a suitable topic for fiction in the official press. War poetry first appeared in February 1982, but not in a major Moscow publication. Instead, the Ukrainian newspaper Molod Ukrainy posthumously published three poems by a hitherto unknown native son, Lieutenant Aleksandr Stovba. Killed in action, Stovba would be one of the first 'afganets' poets to be recognized as a

[18]L. Mironov and S. Svistunov, 'Na Afganskom severe', Pravda 26 April 1981: 4.
[19]'Zashchishchat' zavoevaniya revolyutsii', Pravda 27 April 1981: 5.
[20]'Vystuplenie B. Karmalya', Pravda 25 April 1981: 5.
[21]I. Andronov, 'V gorakh Afganistana', Krasnaya zvezda 30 Sept. 1981: 3. The eulogy, also describing the grieving parents of the young officer, is unabashedly patriotic and even nationalistic: 'No doubt about it, the face of the young man in front of me -- Russian, bright-eyed, broad-cheeked -- told me from the first glance: this is a Slav.'
[22]Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Vstrechi na Maivande', Literaturnaya gazeta 22 April 1981: 7.

member of a new generation of military writers.[23] Also, a novel by Kim Selikhov entitled Ne"obyavlennaya voina (The Undeclared War) was published in 1983. This book dealt exclusively with the Afghans' struggle against internal treachery and foreign imperialists, and made practically no mention of Soviet soldiers.[24]

Thus, by the time of Leonid Brezhnev's death in November 1982, a composite picture was slowly beginning to take shape in the press, describing a difficult conflict against a tenacious opponent who did not yield easily to superior firepower. This admission was underscored in 1983 by further acknowledgement of casualties among Soviet units taking part in combat operations. The labour union newspaper Trud mentioned the death of a Soviet soldier in February 1983, as did Komsomolskaya pravda.[25] Small though these admissions seem in retrospect, it was inevitable that wider recognition would be paid sooner or later to the role of Red Army units attempting to pacify the countryside; by this time over seven thousand Soviet military personnel had died in Afghanistan.[26] And according to Malcolm Haslett, BBC World Service analyst, this new development might have been brought about in part by Yury Andropov's own policy of perestroika within the Soviet information bureaucracy, undertaken to increase the credibility of the Soviet media.[27]

By 1984 this frankness ignited a polemic between a reading public which expressed growing dismay over the war and a regime which attempted to limit public relations damage. Discontent was registered over the treatment of wounded veterans returning home, and the government answered this growing tide of resentment with a campaign which publicized the exploits of war heroes who either were killed in action

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[23]Molod Ukrainy 9 Feb. 1982, containing eulogy to Stovba, and following edition containing his poems, cited in 'Afghanistan: Commissars and Corpses', Soviet Analyst 11.8 (21 April 1982): 4. Another article dedicated to Stovba in Trud 24 Feb. 1983, is cited in 'Afghanistan: Long Stuggle Ahead', Soviet Analyst 12.6 (23 March 1983): 2.

[24]Kim Selikhov, Neob"yavlennaya voina (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1983).

[25]Malcolm Haslett, 'Soviet Media Shift on Afghanistan', BBC World Service Current Affairs Research and Information Section(CARIS), Talk 24/83, 7 Feb. 1983.

[26]Figures taken through 1983 from V. Izgarshev, 'Afganskaya bol", Pravda 17 Aug. 1989: 6.

[27]Malcolm Haslett, 'More Soviet Light on Afghanistan', BBC World Service CARIS, Talk 35/83, 25 Feb. 1983.

or who overcame great odds to survive their terrible injuries.[28] The most notable example of this campaign was Pravda's August 1984 article on Sergeant Chepik, a posthumous Hero of the Soviet Union who took his own life and those of surrounding enemy soldiers with a grenade.[29] Indeed, throughout 1985, Gorbachev's ostensible policy regarding publicity about the war adhered to the unswervingly conservative political line which he inherited from previous regimes.[30] Voenizdat, for instance, continued its campaign of pro-regime publicistic literature by publishing a collection of dramatic documentary accounts of fourteen military men awarded the 'Hero of the Soviet Union' for valour in Afghanistan.[31] Towards the end of 1985, Krasnaya zvezda reinforced this general trend by dedicating a new regular feature column, 'Afghanistan -- The Place of Heroic Deeds'.[32] Furthermore, writers drew parallels with the Great Patriotic War in an effort to legitimize the Afghan conflict: thus, an example was made of Captain Valery Grinchak, who returned to active duty after losing both his legs in a mine explosion.[33] The author of the article compared Grinchak to Aleksei Mares'ev, the pilot whose successful struggle to overcome a comparable loss was documented in Boris Polevoi's popular World War Two novel The Story of a Real Man.

The literary works of Prokhanov, Selikhov, and Stovba from 1981 through 1983 were to be the last major instances of 'Afghan' fiction or poetry published for several years. During this period (1982-85) the Communist Party lost three leaders within as many years, which no doubt contributed to a wait-and-see attitude among members of the creative intelligentsia. Only Prokhanov broke the silence early in 1985

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[28]Trehub, 'Soviet Press Coverage' 2.

[29]M. Istomin, 'Paren' iz Chernogo Maya', Pravda 2 Aug. 1984: 6.

[30]A. Ivanov, the conservative Molodaya gvardiya editor-in-chief, not only received the Hero of Socialist Labour award but also was seated next to Chernenko in a photograph appearing in Literaturnaya gazeta. See Sergei Yurenen, 'The Literary Struggle: From Chernenko to Gorbachev', Radio Liberty Bulletin 84/85 (18 March 1985): 1.

[31]I. M. Dynin, ed., Zvezdy podviga (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1985).

[32]Malcolm Haslett, 'Russia Writes Up the Afghan War', BBC World Service CARIS, Talk 88/85, 14 Nov. 1985.

[33]N. Baklanov, 'Pobratim Mares'eva', Izvestiya 17 Sept. 1985: 3.

with 'Sedoi soldat' ('The Grey-Haired Soldier'). This short adventure tale, an extract from the novel in progress to be called 'Sketches of a Battlefield Artist', restricted itself to describing combat heroism, which was consistent with this period of political constraint.[34]

Western commentator Sergei Yurenen noted, however, that with Gorbachev's ascension to power in 1985, new literary battle lines between liberals and conservatives were in fact being drawn behind the scenes. Yurenen labelled the liberals 'revivalists' because of their desire to return to the freedoms enjoyed under the New Economic Policy of the early 1920s.[35] Represented by such publications as Novyi mir and Druzhba narodov, as yet they were not permitted to write about the Afghan war in the official press. The political pressure from the 'revivalists' was evident, however, when at the Sixth Congress of the RSFSR Union of Writers in December 1985, Lieutenant General D. A. Volkogonov, Deputy Chief of the Main Political Directorate, briefly mentioned that the Afghan conflict could now assume its proper place in Soviet literature. 'We entreat writers to write books about the modern army ... or [about] Afghanistan. That is, today's army, and the daily life of today's armed forces, are deserving of more literary attention.'[36] Volkogonov no doubt had in mind the 'state writers' as represented in the pages of Molodaya gvardiya and Moskva.[37] The leading state representative in war fiction was Aleksandr Prokhanov, who in the pages of Literaturnaya gazeta justified the occupation and explained his 'Defence Genre' as a weapon in the spiritual and technological struggle against the western powers of darkness.[38] While the conservatives still enjoyed a monopoly of power in the press, Prokhanov published his second novel on the Afghan War, 'Risunki batalista' ('Sketches of a Battlefield Artist') and his first independent short story 'Svetlei lazuri'

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[34] Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Sedoi soldat', Znamya 2 (1985): 116-56.
[35] Yurenen, 'The Literary Struggle' 1.
[36] Shestoi s'ezd pisatelei RSFSR (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1987) 95-96.
[37] Yurenen, 'The Literary Struggle' 4-5.
[38] Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Zapiski na brone', Literaturnaya gazeta 28 Aug. 1985: 14, and 'Vyberem svet, a ne t'mu', Pravda 24 Oct. 1985: 4.

('Brighter than Sky Blue') in late 1986.[39] Similar to the contemporaneous press campaign concerning feats of daring, these works focused on the daily heroism exhibited by the average Soviet soldier, especially in contrast to the quotidian and self-satisfied existence of his civilian counterpart in Russia. But they were also ideologically orthodox works which justified the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and drew 'a line in the sand' against the 'revivalists' who would soon try their political power in the press.

Indeed, as early as the XXVII Party Congress in February1986, Gorbachev signalled a difficult road ahead for purveyors of standard military propaganda when he characterized the war in Afghanistan as 'a bleeding wound'.[40] Towards the end of 1986, reportage inevitably began to reflect the growing awareness among publicists that their readership must be prepared for a future withdrawal of troops. Gennady Bocharov reported on the widely publicized pull-out of six regiments from Afghanistan in October 1986.[41] This partial withdrawal was given little credibility at the time in the West; a US Department of State report mentioned Gorbachev's 28 July withdrawal announcement under the heading 'Soviet Withdrawal Deception'.[42] In retrospect, however, the Soviet leader not only transmitted to the world his intention to withdraw forces from the region, but also granted his domestic audience a new permission to speak out about the war. After all, a policy of withdrawal could as easily have been announced under a rubric of honourable return after the victorious achievement of military and political goals, omitting any reference to defeat.

After Gorbachev's speech, Aleksandr Prokhanov came under increasing attack on both literary and political grounds for his strident defence of the military's role in

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[39]Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Risunki batalista', Moskva 9 (1986): 33-155; 10 (1986): 11-106; and 'Svetlei lazuri', Oktyabr' 9 (1986): 3-55.

[40]M. S. Gorbachev, 'Doklad General'nogo sekretarya TsK KPSS', Literaturnaya gazeta 26 Feb. 1986: 7.

[41]Gennady Bocharov, 'Vozvrashchenie', Literaturnaya gazeta 15 Oct. 1986: 14.

[42]United States, Department of State, Afghanistan: Seven Years of Occupation, Special Report 155 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1986) 10.

contemporary politics.[43] And veterans of the war began to test their political strength after years of political anonymity. Though no officially sanctioned groups yet existed, ex-soldiers began to coalesce into small, informal associations.[44] With ever increasing frequency, they vented their frustrations over a dearth of proper medical care and lack of benefits by writing letters to newspaper editors, seeking to redress the lack of official attention to their plight. One of the first mentions of veterans' clubs, a Leningrad regional organization for 'internationalist servicemen who served in the DRA', occurs early the following year.[45]

The military establishment now felt itself under increasing pressure, and did not retreat gracefully. General Aleksei Lizichev, chief of the Armed Forces Main Political Administration, denounced 'pacifist elements' at a 1986 Ministry of Defence conference on the role of literature in the military-patriotic education of youth. He claimed that contemporary writers were creating the wrong picture of the Great Patriotic War and of the army's current role.[46] The general stated his belief that the tragic side of war was over-emphasized to the detriment of heroic characterizations, and that despite their potential promise, acceptable military themes (including 'the carrying out of their patriotic and internationalist duty by Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan') were being neglected. It may be inferred that he was attacking 'anti-war prose' writers such as Ales' Adamovich and Svetlana Aleksievich;[47] conversely, the portraits of heroes in Zvezdy podviga (Stars of Valour), I. M. Dynin's compilation of accounts documenting the valour of various Heroes of the Soviet Union, would be deserving of emulation.[48] As General Lizichev and the military leadership fought a determined yet increasingly

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[43]Sergei Yurenen, 'The Vulnerability of Armour: Aleksandr Prokhanov Under Fire From Literary Critics', Radio Liberty Bulletin 207/86 (26 May 1986): 4.
[44]Bohdan Nahaylo, 'Soviet Veterans of the War in Afghanistan: A New Social Force?' Radio Liberty Research Bulletin 241/86 (24 June 1986): 1.
[45]'DRA Veterans' Club in Leningrad Oblast', BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/8510 (7 March 1987): A3/5.
[46]Malcolm Haslett, 'Soviet Generals Warn Against Pacifism', BBC World Service CARIS, Talk 61/86, 13 June 1986.
[47]Sergei Yurenen, '298 Awards for Soviet Literature: A Commentary', Radio Liberty Research Bulletin 59/85 (22 Feb. 1985): 4.
[48]Dynin, Zvezdy podviga.

ineffective rearguard action against liberal reformers, the divergence between these two political movements was to become especially apparent during the following year.

Against this backdrop of growing conflict, 1987 was a watershed year for coverage of the war, and the beginning of a new stage in publicity. Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, along with negotiations for the withdrawal of Soviet forces, combined to allow unprecedented freedom to discuss the war. This new stage was characterized by the appearance of documentary accounts as well as short stories and poems which in comparison to earlier periods would exhibit a remarkable frankness, especially regarding negative aspects of the conflict.

Proper documentation of the war within the Soviet press had long been lacking. In August 1987, P. Studenikin, a Pravda correspondent, criticized his own profession for biased coverage of the war. In reply to a grieving father's letter which bitterly attacked the mass media for miserly and unrealistic coverage of the war, Studenikin admitted that the press was unprepared for combat reporting and had spent too much time filing stories about soldiers planting trees for friendship and Soviet surgeons delivering Afghan babies.[49] Indeed, the latter half of 1987 witnessed the most outspoken reportage from Afghanistan to date. In July, Artem Borovik published in Ogonek a three-part serialization called 'Vstretimsya u trekh zhuravlei' ('Let Us Meet at the Three Cranes').[50] The author's personal impressions are interspersed with those of his subjects; Soviet readers had never before encountered idiosyncratic observations about the Afghan War. A similar investigative mission was undertaken by Elena Losoto, reporter for Komsomolskaya pravda, in December 1987.[51] Losoto's prose was more restrained than Borovik's, but she too devoted much effort to familiarizing

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[49]P. Studenikin, 'Ya vas v Afganistan ne posylal...', Pravda 5 Aug. 1987: 3.

[50]Artem Borovik, 'Vstretimsya u trekh zhuravlei', Ogonek 28 (1987): 20-22; 29 (1987): 20-24; 30 (1987): 18-21.

[51]Elena Losoto, Komandirovka na voinu (Moscow: Kniga, 1990). From statements in the book, this material apparently was originally serialized in Komsomolskaya pravda 15 Dec. 1987 through 15 Feb. 1988.

her Soviet audience with the daily hardships of soldiers serving in Afghanistan. True, both authors were self-congratulatory at times, and in certain cases they still wore ideological blinkers. To cite only two instances: Borovik attempted to refute analogies to Vietnam even though the comparison informs his interview with British correspondent Peter Arnett; and Losoto initially claimed that dedovshchina, or harrassment in the ranks, did not exist among the Afghanistan contingent. Both authors, however, revealed disturbing facts to their Soviet audiences that tested the bounds of glasnost. Stylistically, Borovik's articles are particularly innovative; they form a bridge between documentary accounts of the war and a personal, imaginative interpretation of events, both of which characterize this third stage of publicity.

The situation with regard to fiction also began to change with the November 1987 publication of Yury Polyakov's 'Sto dnei do prikaza' ('One Hundred Days Until the Order').[52] This story, set in the Soviet Union, initially caused a sensation in June when an excerpt, published in Moskovskii komsomolets, depicted the barbaric treatment meted out to new recruits.[53] The contentious subject of 'unregulated relations between soldiers', or harrassment in the ranks (known colloquially as dedovshchina, godkovshchina, or starikovshchina) was brought into the arena of public scrutiny for the first time.[54] The story caused a sensation, with critics in the military attacking the depiction as deceptive.[55] Although the topic had nothing to do with the war -- in fact, Polyakov's one reference in the story to relations among men in Afghanistan was positive -- the subject was particularly sensitive due to the unfavourable light it cast upon an army already under growing pressure for its role in Afghanistan. Another publication in the realm of fiction occurred in 1987, this time a story about the war. An unknown veteran named Oleg Ermakov appeared in print for the first time with a short

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[52] Yury Polyakov, 'Sto dnei do prikaza', Yunost' 11 (1987): 47-68.
[53] Stephen Dalziel, The Soviet Military and Glasnost': The Problem of "Non-Regulation Relations" D51 (RMA Sandhurst: Soviet Studies Research Centre, March 1988): 3.
[54] Stuart Dalrymple, 'Bullying in the Soviet Army', Radio Liberty Research Bulletin 185/88 (29 April 1988): 1.
[55] For example, see V. Yakimets, 'Somnitel'naya pravda', Krasnaya zvezda 5 July 1987: 2; and A. Sklyar, letter, Sovetskii voin 2 (1988): 33.

story entitled 'Prosto byla osen" ('It was Simply Autumn').[56] This brief lyrical glance at the war through the eyes of a young soldier went generally unnoticed, but in retrospect it foreshadowed the advent of a new, non-polemical treatment of the war in fiction. As an additional harbinger of the new wave of 'Afghan' literature, official publications of soldiers' songs first appeared in 1987. Kogda poyut soldaty (When Soldiers Sing) sold out immediately and went through a second printing as well.[57] This book, published by official military organs and primarily patriotic in content, was a significant step beyond the limited exposure to soldiers' songs previously granted in official publications.

Despite these advances, in January 1988 Evgeny Evtushenko was still able to criticize 'little books containing false bravado, and superficial reporting, and brave-faced documentaries' which in his opinion had constituted the main legacy of the war in print until that time.[58] The first relatively candid collection of soldiers' personal accounts was to appear not long after, however, printed by Znamya in July 1988.[59] In '"Afgantsy"', twelve soldiers guide the reader through three chronological stages of their individual experiences in the Afghan war: conscription, combat, and demobilization. The ex-soldiers are allowed to speak for themselves about their own experiences, using military jargon to talk about their trade. In fact, the Znamya article provided a balanced if limited portrait of soldiers who not only were motivated to carry out their 'internationalist duty' in Afghanistan, but in fact remained highly patriotic after demobilization.

In 1988, new examples of 'revivalist' prose, poetry, and song also came to light. With the story 'On byl moi samyi luchshii drug' ('He Was My Best Friend'), Oleg Khandus published a pessimistic portrayal of irrationally violent and darkly

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[56]Oleg Ermakov, 'Prosto byla osen", Oktyabr' 12 (1987): 55-58.
[57]Petr Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1987). The second printing announced in A. Marinova, 'Ne dlya voiny rozhdayutsya soldaty', Literaturnaya gazeta 10 Feb. 1988: 1.
[58]Evgeny Evtushenko, 'Vzaimogumannost", Literaturnaya gazeta 29 Jan. 1988: 14.
[59]'"Afgantsy"', Znamya 7 (1988): 185-219.

ecstatic experiences which render a soldier alienated forever from his civilian counterparts.[60] Evgeny Evtushenko put the same sentiment into verse with his poem 'Koldunchik' ('The Little Sorcerer'), describing the murder of a girl at the hands of an Afghan war veteran.[61] A second separate collection of songs also was printed the next year by Voenizdat under the title Vremya vybralo nas (Time Chose Us). [62]

By this time, political justification of the original policy of intervention had collapsed. The first official Party repudiation of the decision to send troops into Afghanistan took place at the XIX Party Congress in Moscow during June 1988.[63] Increasingly strident criticism in the press about its own culpability during the occupation also surfaced. Even Prokhanov admitted his own failure, and that of other writers and journalists, to diagnose the situation within Afghanistan during the course of the previous decade.[64] Besides, from this point on, official reporters were to face the prospect of competition from unregulated publications, as an Independent Press Club was established in May 1988 at a meeting in Moscow of editors from approximately thirty samizdat publications from across the country.[65]

In February 1989 the last Soviet soldier departed from Afghanistan, and with the end of Soviet participation in the war, revelations appeared from the previously unpublished notebooks of war correspondents. Vladimir Snegirev related eye-witness accounts of a suspected enemy who was strangled by members of the Afghan security forces, and of a Russian collaborator who sold diesel fuel to the enemy and ultimately sided with the mujahedin before being recaptured by the Soviets.[66] In the latter case, the reporter included the youth's account of beatings received at the hands of senior Russian troops during his initial months of service, an unspoken indictment of the

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[60]Oleg Khandus, 'On byl moi samyi luchshy drug', Ural 1 (1988): 59-63.
[61]Evgeny Evtushenko, 'Koldunchik', Avrora 9 (1988): 39-40.
[62]Petr Tkachenko, Vremya vybralo nas (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988).
[63]Stephen Dalziel, 'Badges But No Medals for Afghan Veterans', BBC World Service CARIS, Talk 149/88, 29 Dec. 1988.
[64]Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Afganistan', Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn' 7 (1988): 27, as cited by Trehub, 'Soviet Press Coverage' 4.
[65]'Towards a Free Press?', Soviet Analyst 17.11 (1 June 1988): 6.
[66]Vladimir Snegirev, 'Pro voinu', Komsomolskaya pravda 9 Feb. 1989: 4.

army. Gennady Bocharov recounted an episode in which innocent Afghan eye-witnesses were murdered to cover up the mistaken shooting of one of their party who had driven through a military checkpoint.[67] He also took note of speculators in drugs and weapons -- by implication soldiers -- who shamefully profited from the war. Indeed, under the banner of glasnost, an article in Literaturnaya gazeta only several months earlier had for the first time openly discussed drug abuse in the armed forces.[68] Although the article used an historical approach to cushion the blow of such public revelations, citing the deleterious effects of illicit drugs on armies ranging from Napolean's expeditionary force in Egypt to the American contingent in Vietnam, the stress was placed on the experience of Afghan veterans.

As a sidelight to this period of unfettered documentation, Afghan veterans, like other political interest groups, began to take advantage of Gorbachev's liberalized press laws by publishing their own newspapers in 1989. The Orenburg newspaper Kontingent first appeared in August 1989 and would prove to be one of the most popular -- and resilient -- of veterans' publications. In contrast, a paper based in the Altai was less fortunate. Under the banner Shuravi,[69] it published Andrei Sakharov's original letter of protest to Brezhnev about the invasion, along with satirical aphorisms 'From A Demobbed Soldier's Notebook'. But this newspaper lasted for only two issues (August and December 1989) due to fiscal woes. Meanwhile, veterans attending Moscow State University suggested devoting an issue of their departmental student newspaper Zhurnalist to veterans' concerns; the first of three editions came out in February 1989, with subsequent special editions appearing in August 1989 and June 1991. The political establishment also decided to invest in, if not co-opt, this movement. In December the official Moscow-based Union of Afghan Veterans began publishing the newspaper Pobratim. This paper enjoyed official sponsorship by the Ministry of Defence, the KGB, the Moscow City Soviet Executive Committee, the

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[67]Gennady Bocharov, 'Afghan' [sic], Literaturnaya gazeta 15 Feb. 1989: 14.
[68]Boris Kalachev, 'Etomu ne mesto v stroyu', Literaturnaya gazeta 26 Oct. 1988: 12.
[69]This newspaper takes its name from the Afghan term for 'Soviets'.

USSR Zhilsotsbank, Gostelradio, the Moscow Patriarchate, and Novosti Press Agency. It did not share the difficulties of obtaining financial support that interrupted or destroyed other independent publications. In Moscow, a more recent newcomer is Pereval which began in May 1990. This newspaper does not limit itself exclusively to veterans' concerns, but also covers a broad range of social topics. After struggling with financial losses, this publication expected to begin appearing regularly in 1992.[70]

Documentary accounts, fictional literature, and poetry all increased markedly in 1989. The completed withdrawal of troops, coupled with growing domestic dissent over the war which was now allowed free expression, resulted in a rapid increase in literary fiction concerning the war. Of the prose works uncovered by the current study, roughly 10% appeared before 1988, 10% appeared during 1988, and 80% have been published since 1989. To cite several particular instances: Artem Borovik's sensational second installment of Afghan dispatches, written during the final pull-out in January and February 1989, was published in the December issue of Ogonek under the title 'Spryatannaya voina' ('The Hidden War').[71] Aleksandr Prokhanov published two major short stories in 1989 which deviated remarkably from his previous politically orthodox works.[72] Also in 1989, Oleg Ermakov, having stayed silent for a year after the publication of his first short story, published no fewer than nine short stories in Znamya and Novyi mir.[73] A young poet named Aleksandr Karpenko, who was already known for his songs, published a non-polemical booklet of verses entitled Razgovory so smert'yu (Conversations with Death), and both Znamya and Novyi mir printed poems written by veterans on the subject of the war.[74] By 1991, stories which

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[70]Information on newspapers obtained from Vladimir Boshin, Editor of Pereval, personal interview, Moscow, 25 September 1991; and from newspaper archives at the Museum of Internationalists, Lyublinskaya Street, Moscow.

[71]Artem Borovik, 'Spryatannaya voina', Ogonek 46 (1989): 17-20; 49 (1989): 17-20; 50 (1989): 27-29; 51 (1989): 26-30; 52 (1989): 26-29.

[72]Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Rodnen'kii', Moskva 2 (1989): 3-24; 'Musul'manskaya svad'ba' 24-55.

[73]Oleg Ermakov, 'Kreshchenie', Znamya 3 (1989): 93-103; 'Zheltaya gora', 3 (1989): 103-19; 'Blagopoluchnoe vozvrashchenie', Novyi mir 8 (1989): 156-64.

[74]Aleksandr Karpenko, Razgovory so smert'yu (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1989); Aleksandr Bannikov, 'Iz afganskoi tetradi', Znamya 2 (1989): 75; Valery Rubin, 'Reportazh', Novyi mir 1 (1989): 9.

were considered quite controversial only three years before -- including 'Construction Battalion' by Sergei Kaledin, and 'He was My Best Friend' by Oleg Khandus -- were anthologized in a single collection.[75] The first part of Oleg Ermakov's extremely frank novel 'Znak zverya' ('The Sign of the Beast'), in some ways a capstone for the first decade of Afghan War literature, appeared in the June 1992 issue of Znamya.[76]

During this period, it must be noted, conservative forces within the military literary field attempted to ignore changes which had occurred in the political and artistic spheres. A brief but vivid indication of the traditional conservatism of military writers is provided by an episode related by Verstakov. During orientation training one summer during the 1980s, some military writers refused to wear 'new-fangled' items such as the cooler cotton desert fatigues which were earthen-coloured (eksperimentalki). They chose instead to stick, literally, to the traditional greenish-brown World War Two Red Army uniform made of wool, in which they sweltered. The traditionalists, incidentally, dubbed the new uniform 'the Tel Aviv' (tel'avivka).[77] Thus, it is no surprise that in 1988, Krasnaya Zvezda continued its publicistic tradition by publishing a collection of heroic biographical sketches for its military audience entitled Vremya vybralo nas.[78] In the same category was a book from Lenizdat entitled Vo imya vysokoi tseli (In the Name of the High Ideal) about the exploits of soldiers in Afghanistan.[79] Moreover, in 1989 Molodaya gvardiya printed Viktor Svetikov's three documentary fiction tales in Vershiny (The Heights), notable for their exceptionally partisan military prose.[80] It must be admitted that Molodaya gvardiya at times appeared to straddle the political divide between the two camps. In 1990, for example, it brought out Vozvrashchenie iz Afganistana (Return from Afghanistan), a liberal journalistic

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[75]Leonid Alekseevich Teplov, comp., Kreshchenie: povesti i rasskazy molodykh pisatelei o sovremennoi armii (Moscow: Pravda, 1991).
[76]Oleg Ermakov, 'Znak zverya', Znamya 6 (1992): 6-86.
[77]Verstakov 375.
[78]A. Belousov, ed., Vremya vybralo nas (Moscow: Krasnaya zvezda, 1988).
[79]Ivan Andreevich Ponomarev, Vo imya vysokoi tseli (Leningrad: Lenizdat, 1988).
[80]Viktor Svetikov, Vershiny (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1989).

investigation of the war by Ninel' Strel'tsova. Primarily, however, it remained a traditionally conservative publishing house.

High-ranking military officers continued to speak out against every sort of revisionist interpretation of the war effort. General Volkogonov praised the ideological soundness of Aleksandr Prokhanov in May 1987.[81] General Gromov, commander of the 40th Army in Afghanistan, also aligned himself with the conservatives. In March 1989 he warned against false conclusions about the war, drawn by dissident commentators who lacked proper combat credentials:

Nowadays, when the Afghan theme has come out into the open, there have appeared many honourable, objective publications, but along with them, from time to time, you will also see material of quite a different sort. Some authors, 'earning' the right to draw sweeping generalizations by virtue of a few days' stay in Afghanistan, attempt to create an artificial issue concerning the 'afgantsy' in the USSR. They bring to light and exaggerate certain isolated negative facts, thus blackening the exploits of all those Soviet people who have carried out their internationalist duty with honour.[82]

In April 1990, USSR Defence Minister General Dmitri Yazov joined his voice to this apparently beleaguered minority when he asked contemporary military writers to defend the army against attacks levelled by other sectors of society.[83] One month later, Marshal of the Soviet Union V. G. Kulikov criticized Ogonek journalists for their 'socio-political activity' by saying that recent articles about the army went beyond 'criticism' and were motivated instead by 'malice'. He called for 'these tendencies to be exposed and the reason for their occurrence determined.'[84] Finally, in October 1990, USSR People's Deputy General Lobov lamented that it had

become almost 'fashionable' in some mass media to attack the honour of the military and the Soviet army's history ... the campaign of demoralizing young people in the army is waged by small groups of persons sheltering beneath the mastheads of authoritative publications ...[85]

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[81]'Sovremennost' i literatura', Literaturnaya gazeta 6 May 1987: 1.
[82]B. V. Gromov, 'Zashchishchali, obuchali, stroili', Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal 3 (1989): 15.
[83]'Yazov Appeals to Writers to Support Army', BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/0746 (24 April 1990): B/7.
[84]'The Army and the Press', BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/0771 (23 May 1990): C1/2.
[85]'Lobov Attacks "Blasphemous" Attitudes to Army', BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/0595 (24 Oct. 1989): B/3.

The tide of opinion having moved against them, the conservatives suffered ultimate humiliation in June 1990 when political pressure forced Yazov to apologize publicly to the mothers of soldiers killed in Afghanistan. The difficulty of his apology is reflected in the qualified terms of his statement: 'We lost to some degree the prestige that the Soviet Union and its armed forces enjoyed after the victorious Great Patriotic War, and also to some degree inflicted terrible pain on families and friends, on our own Soviet people.'[86] The degree to which Yazov felt betrayed by the course of events did not become fully evident until August 1991, when he assumed one of the leading roles in the coup attempt. In the aftermath, Gromov was also demoted from his post of Deputy Chief of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Only after 1990 could an assessment take place of the military censors' role concerning the war. Vladimir Verstakov, correspondent for Pravda, admitted, 'True, in the first years of the Afghan events we, the writers, were not allowed to write about the shedding of blood', and confessed to his own 'oversimplifications' and 'silences'.[87] One soldier mentions a Krasnaya zvezda article, published between 1982 and 1983, about practice helicopter attacks in Germany in which all targets were predictably destroyed. 'But just that morning we'd seen helicopters try to take out some mujahedin guns. They couldn't do it on the second or even third attempt, and these were experienced aircrew.'[88] In another example of ideological censorship, the government could not acknowledge the existence of Soviet prisoners of war. This was not because of the obsolete Stalinist equation branding prisoners as traitors because of exposure to western European civilization, but because the modern prisoner of war obviously predicated the conduct of combat, which the government was not willing to admit.[89] In 1985 reporters were still forbidden to refer to combat operations without

[86]'Yazov's Apologies to Mothers of Afghan War Dead', BBC Summary of World Broadcasts SU/0785 (8 June 1990): A3/3.
[87]Verstakov 5.
[88][A. A. Tarasov], '"Afgantsy"', Znamya 7 (1988): 207. The article '"Afgantsy"' is unattributed, but appears later as A. A. Tarasov, comp., Moskvichi iz Kluba "Dolg" (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1988). Subsequent citations to Tarasov will refer to the article '"Afgantsy"' in Znamya.
[89]Strel'tsova 25.

clearance from authorities in Moscow and Kabul, and they were prohibited from mentioning the 40th Army in print or identifying its commanders. Only toward the end of the war was General Gromov's name finally authorized for publication, and then only if accompanied by 'non-specific, positive comments'.[90] As late as 1986, Afghan regular soldiers reportedly were presented for a 'photo opportunity' with Moscow journalists after a battle for a hill fought by Soviet troops.[91]

Those who disagreed with the authorities on these issues were subjected to intense pressure. In 1986, Colonel Vladimir Kovalevsky was expelled from the Party and stripped of his military rank for comparing the Soviet involvement in Afghanistan to the American conflict in Vietnam.[92] Vitaly Korotich, editor of Ogonek, claimed that Borovik's 1987 Afghan dispatches were initially disapproved by the censors, only to be released for publication after Gorbachev's personal intervention. This was reminiscent of Krushchev's intervention in 1962, when he personally approved the publication of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich'.[93] Sergei Kaledin's 'Stroibat' ('Construction Battalion'),[94] a contemporary picture of army life describing drug abuse and rampant violence in a peacetime construction unit, was suppressed as late as April 1989 by the military authorities. The publication in Novyi mir originally had been set for April 1988 but it was delayed for a year because of objections from the army's Main Political Directorate.[95] Artem Borovik claims that his article 'The Hidden War', which was finally serialized in December 1989, was subjected over the period of the previous three months to 'more than 200 serious deletions, distortions, additions, and corrections made by the heavy hand of the colonel-censor.'[96] This pressure extended beyond the press to the electronic media as

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[90]Verstakov 175, 172-73.
[91]Aleksievich, 'Tsinkovye mal'chiki' 24.
[92]Vera Tolz, 'The USSR This Week: Union of Democratic Afghan Veterans Speaks Out', Radio Liberty Bulletin 2.15 (13 April 1990): 30.
[93]Hedrick Smith, The New Russians (London: Random House, 1991) 103-04.
[94]Sergei Kaledin, 'Stroibat', Novyi mir 4 (1989): 59-89.
[95]Kira Sapgir, 'Opilki i magnit', Kontinent 63 (1990): 355.
[96]Artem Borovik, The Hidden War (London: Faber and Faber, 1991) 279.

well. The normally live televised programme 'Vzglyad' was unexpectedly broadcast in censored videotaped format in October 1989, with cuts to the final segment concerning 'conditions set by the Afghan mujahidin for the release of Soviet prisoners of war'.[97]

The censorship of the era can also be charted by looking at early dispatches which were republished with changes and additions in the era of glasnost. Two examples are afforded by Viktor Verstakov and Gennady Bocharov. Verstakov, who holds the rank of colonel in the reserve army, was a war correspondent for Pravda and is a latter-day poet and songwriter of the Afghan war in his own right. In 1983 Voenizdat printed his Afganskii dnevnik (Afghan Diary), a propagandistic primer to the war which splices together snippets of history and reportage. His book was reprinted in 1991, however, by the same publisher, with changes and additions. Among them was a foreword in which he admits that in the first years of the war writers were guilty of 'oversimplifications' and 'silences'.[98] In a specific instance of rewriting, both versions of his Diary describe a meeting with a man whose son died on a helicopter training flight in Afghanistan. The 1983 version concludes this meeting with the line, 'The memory of past heroes is sacred, but one must not forget the exploits of their sons.'[99] The 1991 version eliminates this line, and instead emphasizes the much more personal and tragic truth: 'I made a gift to him of a poem, in which I described that same Bamian Valley in which his son had died.'[100] The entire poem is then printed. By coincidence, the airman who died was the grandson of Soviet writer Fedor Gladkov, who under political pressure rewrote his novel Cement several times during the Stalin era, just as Verstakov -- taking advantage, however, of liberalization -- re-edited Afghan Diary during the Gorbachev era.

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[97]Vera Tolz, 'The USSR This Week: "Vzglyad" Censored Because of Afghanistan Coverage', Radio Liberty Research Bulletin 42/89 (20 Oct. 1989): 35.
[98]Verstakov 5.
[99]Viktor Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1983) 136. See also Verstakov, 'Bez otmetki na kalendare', Yunost' 8 (1982): 96.
[100]Verstakov 119-20.

The second example is Gennady Bocharov, who modified his original Russian publication Byl i videl (I Was There and Witnessed) when publishing the subsequent expanded English-language version entitled Russian Roulette. In I Was There, the camera operator Vladimir Gusev is depicted as a brave hero under fire, but an anonymous cameraman in identical circumstances is made the butt of ridicule in Russian Roulette, when the firing is shown to be merely a showpiece for the cameras.[101] In similar fashion, the author's earlier Russian account of an interview with a Pushtun refugee places responsibility on the mujahedin for the refugee's misfortune, whereas in the later English edition, the culpability is vaguely diffused.[102]

It should be noted that although Bocharov assumes responsibility for his role in the bias of early coverage, I find his credibility is still open to question after comparing passages from these two editions. Though both works purport to be factual journalism, some sections -- identical in every other respect -- nevertheless are different for no discernible reason. For example, an account in Byl i videl documenting the exploits of Ruslan Aushev, a Hero of the Soviet Union is changed in Russian Roulette to attribute the same actions to a Major Obrushev.[103] Likewise, Bocharov's own observations as a participant in the former work are voiced instead by a young doctor named Lieutenant Shmelev in the latter. Differences of this type, which cannot be accounted for by hypothetical restrictions of censorship, call into question the veracity of either account. In contrast, Verstakov's textual revisions may be explained by the conditions of glasnost. And unlike Bocharov, he seems truly anguished over the divide between his loyalty to the Party and his emotional commitment to freedom of artistic expression -- not only for the sake of his own poetry, but for soldiers' songs as well.

In 1988 literary criticism concerning contemporary stories, poems, and songs about the conflict appeared for the first time. Two distinct and countervailing trends in

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[101]Gennady Bocharov, Byl i videl (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo polit. literatury, 1987) 29; Russian Roulette 169.
[102]Byl i videl 135, Russian Roulette 14.
[103]Byl i videl 23, Russian Roulette 164.

Afghan War literature have been observed by Soviet critics. The first was a tendency to depict negative or shocking aspects of the war. When in 1988 V. Okulov, Pravda correspondent, attended an evening of music and poetry at a Soviet army canteen in Kabul, he noted the distinctly minor key of most compositions: 'Where are the stories about victories in battle? Why does a tragic legacy remain in the memory? What is the reason for such selectivity?'[104] Likewise, Petr Tkachenko criticized the negative depictions of veterans found in short stories such as 'On byl moi samyi luchshii drug' ('He Was My Best Friend') by Oleg Khandus, 'Reis k domu' ('Flight Home') by Leonid Bogachuk, and in poems similar to Evgeny Evtushenko's 'Koldunchik' ('The Little Sorcerer'). Their protagonists are violent, anti-social misfits rendered unfit for society by their experiences in Afghanistan. Tkachenko believed that 'either from lack of information, or from moral blindness, the "afgantsy" are perceived as something they are not', and thus argued the case for publication of more songs and poems written by the veterans themselves. Through such exposure, the general public could develop a sympathy for the veterans' actual feelings and experiences, allowing Afghan War literature to heal social and moral wounds in the time-honoured tradition of Russian letters.[105]

The opposing trend expresses the conservative, patriotic feelings of many Afghan veterans. The literary critic Vyacheslav Kuritsyn took issue with his colleague Yury Andreev for attacking the 'unwaveringly positive tone' (that is, love of country and optimism) found in certain Afghan songs. Kuritsyn believes that the artistic expression of patriotism and faith in human strength is valid and should not be denied on ideological grounds. Indeed, he sees a direct connection between contemporary romantic military ballads and songs of old by quoting Aleksandr Prokhanov's comparison of modern soldiers to their Cossack spiritual ancestors: 'instead of a steed, a BTR, and in place of sabre and spear, an AK rifle.'[106] On a related note, Petr

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[104]V. Okulov, 'Afganistan zhivet v moei dushe...', Pravda 3 Feb. 1988: 6.
[105]Petr Tkachenko, 'Kak ty zhivesh', moi drug i brat?..', Krasnaya zvezda 5 Nov. 1988: 3.
[106]Verstakov 215-16. Prokhanov's quote originally appeared in 'Zapiski na brone'.

Tkachenko distinguishes Afghan War literature from another contemporary Soviet movement known as 'rough' (zhestkaya) literature.[107] According to Tkachenko, this modern tendency condemns to destruction all the human qualities of characters caught in social cataclysm; their situation is hopeless. In his opinion, Afghan veteran writers gravitate toward a more classical Dostoevskian conception of tragedy which permits ultimate redemption. Tkachenko also praises the newer generation of writers for their uncompromising stand on the importance of historical fact and dramatic verisimilitude, and criticizes the propagandistic works of earlier writers. Indeed, he predicts that 'Afghan' authors may one day point the direction for Russian literature in general, but not before time has allowed them to achieve social equilibrium after the disorienting and sometimes traumatic spiritual displacement suffered in the fighting.

It must also be noted that at the present time, in the words of critic Vyacheslav Kuritsyn, 'The smell of blood is still too near' for critics to discuss war literature in purely aesthetic terms. The ethical problem of guilt also has arisen; in fact, Kuritsyn argues that society has a short-term obligation to publish works of dubious literary merit in the interest of redressing grievances about suppression of the truth.[108] In this regard, psychologist Dmitry Ol'shansky stated that currently only veterans suffer from the 'Afghan syndrome' of repressed guilt and resultant hostility, and that this problem would not be solved until responsibility is publicly shared by the rest of society.[109] Making matters worse, this syndrome, he felt, was being ignored by writers dealing with the Afghan war. This issue has continued from 1990 to the present day, as both critics and writers work in a context of national self-condemnation concerning the war.

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[107]Tkachenko, 'My eshche ne vernulis''.

[108]Vyacheslav Kuritsyn, 'O chem dumaet sapernaya lopata?', Znamya 5 (1990): 212.

[109]Dmitry Ol'shansky, 'Afganskii sindrom' 18. In December 1989 the Supreme Soviet Committee for Internal Affairs issued a report on the initial decision to send troops to Afghanistan, which, it said, 'merits moral and political condemnation'. Brezhnev, Ustinov, Gromyko and Andropov were blamed, but the Committee emphasized that the centralized system would have ratified the decision in any case. See also 'Report of 24th December'.

Afghan War literature has passed through a turbulent evolution during its first decade, affected not only by the revolutionary political changes which have destroyed the former Soviet Union, but also reflecting the trauma of losing the war. And although three different stages arguably may be delineated as above, the dates mark transition periods rather than boundaries. Indeed, because the last two periods -- of propagandistic accounts, and liberal reinterpretation of the war -- are continuing at the time of this writing, there is necessarily an overlap. Thus, if officially generated apotheoses of soldiers killed in battle were superseded by more subjective views in 1987, they nevertheless continue to appear today. Likewise, documentary forms did not cease in 1989 with the emergence of belles lettres; on the contrary, the volume of war memoirs is increasing. And the same logic applies, of course, to the origins of each successive stage. Descriptions of heroism and lyric poetry did not spring fully formed from the preceding periods at a particular point in time, but rather may be seen in each case to possess antecedents. For example, accounts of daring exploits in the mid-eighties are a variant -- although one-sided -- of the more negative documentation period which was to follow. Likewise, soldiers' songs were present, as we shall see, practically from the beginning of the war, even though they only appeared in print during the last years of the fighting. Yet a definite increase in the overall production of literature can be traced as glasnost developed, and as political contraints on authors fell away.

Chapter Three

The Genre of Publitsistika

This chapter will document the Afghan War as portrayed in the Soviet publicistic genre (publitsistika) produced through 1991. The term publitsistika refers here to journalistic literature on contemporary socio-political issues of general public interest.[1] In the case of the Afghan War, this non-fictional writing ranges from official hagiographic accounts of courage in battle, to soldiers' collected first-person accounts, correspondents' previously unpublished notes or commentaries, and investigative journalism. Toward the end of the 1980s, this genre illustrates the daily life of the Soviet soldier in Afghanistan as documented in the era of glasnost, describes the physical artefacts and social cultures with and in which the Soviet limited contingent lived, and reveals those attributes of the environment which attracted the attention of the people who witnessed and initially wrote about the war.

I shall cite instances from approximately fifteen sources, which first will be analysed in order to chart how the genre has evolved over the decade. The contents of these works will then be used to describe the nature of combat in Afghanistan, the soldiers' opinions about the war, the social interrelations of the participants, and the reception given the 'Limited Contingent of Soviet Forces in Afghanistan' (as they were officially known) upon returning home. The genre of publitsistika will thus provide a basic layer of facts and perceptions with which to analyse the fiction and poetry coming out of the war. At the conclusion of this chapter, two examples of publitsistika will be discussed which are valuable not only from the documentary point of view, but also show the ways in which this genre contributes directly to the purely literary depiction of the war.

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[1] I use definitions from S. I. Ozhegov, Slovar' russkogo yazyka (Moscow: Russkii yazyk, 1981). Publitsistika is defined as 'literature on contemporary socio-political issues', but since obshchestvenno- ('socio-') carries an additional denotation of 'public', I have included this in my definition as well. Also, because 'literaturno-publitsisticheskaya deyatel'nost'' is the definition of the journalistic genre, I have added the reference to journalism, which in this case reflects the contribution of war correspondents.

The first type of publitsistika to be discussed concerning the war is exemplified by Zvezdy podviga (Stars of Valour), a collection of fourteen 'studies in publicistic form' ('ocherki v publitsisticheskoi forme') on Afghan War heroes.[2] These studies, of approximately fifteen pages each, had been published previously in newspapers such as Pravda, Krasnaya zvezda, and Komsomolskaya pravda. The majority are written by military journalists; each author focuses on a particular Hero of the Soviet Union, documents his bravery, and uses this example of valour to justify the military intervention (for example, 'We are here to help people in [Afghanistan] live as happily as we live [in the Soviet Union]').[3] There is no countervailing political opinion expressed ('as soon as [his mother] received a letter with the return address 'field post office', she immediately understood: Sasha is there! And her heart beat rapidly and joyfully.')[4] The stories thus carry out one of the tasks of war publitsistika in the early to mid-1980s, which was to develop political consensus favourable to the regime, and publicize examples of ideologically 'correct' responses to the war.[5] This type of official publitsistika is a continuation of standard hagiography from the Great Patriotic War.[6]

Two later examples of this type of literature in the context of the Soviet-Afghan War are Vo imya vysokoi tseli (In The Name of the High Ideal) and Vremya vybralo nas (Time Chose Us).[7] Both collections are similar in style and general purpose to Stars of Valour, and presumably encourage certain social values -- such as those of the soldier who is tolerant of ethnic minorities (High Ideal 12), or those of the self-sacrificing military wife (Time 73) -- within its military audience. By 1988, however,

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[2]Dynin, Zvezdy podviga 3.
[3]Dynin, Zvezdy podviga 39.
[4]Dynin, Zvezdy podviga 79.
[5]Among the contributors are Major Viktor Svetikov and Gennady Bocharov. Their works will feature later as examples of publitsistika and the 'documentary tale' respectively.
[6]For example, see G. I. Andreev and I. D. Vakurov, eds., Soldatskaya slava (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1971).
[7]Ponomarev, and Belousov. This latter book is not to be confused with the identically named collection of Afghan War songs compiled by Petr Tkachenko.

more details of living conditions could be mentioned, such as the installation of a barracks television, for example, and the implication that tape recorders were a common possession (High Ideal 104). This type of detail, though, was invariably placed in a social context reflecting official approval or approbation. The television is tolerated, but the troops 'still preferred books'; the tape recorder, on the other hand, belongs to a juvenile delinquent.

After 1986, the publicistic genre came to include a wider variety of journalistic and literary expressions. Viktor Verstakov, a military correspondent for Pravda, and Gennady Bocharov, reporter for Literaturnaya gazeta, actually produced two different types of publitsistika at different times. Each writer published early books about the war which supported the Soviet role, then subsequently recanted with revised editions which detailed censorship and repression. Verstakov combined his own dispatches and recollections with historical sketches in a 1991 revision of his 1983 Afganskii dnevnik (Afghan Diary); the new edition was characterized as 'sharply publicistic' (ostropublitsisticheskaya) by his publishers.[8] Bocharov's reportage in Byl i videl (IWas There) is a similar example of early pro-regime propaganda, whereas his subsequent update in English, entitled Russian Roulette, is equally enthusiastic in condemning previous journalistic accounts, including his own.[9]

Ninel' Strel'tsova provides an example of investigative reporting with Vozvrashchenie iz Afganistana (Return From Afghanistan).[10] She interviews soldiers, officers, and diplomats in order to explore the validity of political and military justifications used to support the intervention. Posle Afganistana (After Afghanistan) by I. M. Dynin documents the plight of veterans who returned to an ungrateful homeland, and includes government proclamations, letters, documents, and first-hand

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[8]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991). A previous edition was published in 1983.
[9]Bocharov, Byl i videl , and Russian Roulette. The previous chapter has documented the ways in which Bocharov's accounts contradict one another in ways not entirely attributable to censorship.
[10]Strel'tsova. The author generally takes a non-conformist, liberal point of view.

accounts, as well as the reporter's personal observations.[11] The angry tone of Dynin's writing is in contrast to the earlier propagandistic articles in Stars of Valour, which he edited. And Elena Losoto, a reporter for Komsomolskaya pravda, published her dispatches from Afghanistan in a booklet entitled Komandirovka na voinu (Assignment: War Zone) which included readers' (sometimes critical) responses.[12] Artem Borovik, reporter for Ogonek, also published his collected articles about the war in Afganistan: eshche raz pro voinu (Afghanistan: Once More About the War).[13]

Another type of publitsistika consists primarily of participants' accounts and soldiers' letters. In these works, the editor's presence is evidenced primarily by his or her choice of materials for inclusion. Petr Tkachenko, the military correspondent for Krasnaya zvezda and compiler of Afghan War songs, published a book of soldiers' correspondence from the front in Dorogie moi (Dear Family).[14] Such was the publisher's apparent insecurity in dealing with a genre which previously had been subject to rigid control that a disclaimer for accuracy placed sole responsibility for the book's contents on the editor. Although most of the selections are innocuous, certain letters selected by Tkachenko contain references to controversial subjects such as dedovshchina. Related to this book are two collections of first-person accounts. A. A. Tarasov edited a booklet called Moskvichi iz Kluba 'Dolg' (Muscovites from the 'Duty' Club) from interviews published in Znamya. These accounts were fairly frank for their time, using soldiers' slang, and presented the patriotism of the soldiers as well as their bitterness about the war.[15] A similar format was used by Svetlana Aleksievich in 'Tsinkovye mal'chiki' ('Zink Boys'),[16] except that, as in War's Unwomanly Face, her

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[11]I.M. Dynin, Posle Afganistana (Moscow: Profizdat, 1990). The author is described as a 'military publicist' (voennyi publitsist).
[12]Losoto. Statements in the book imply that the material was first serialized in Komsomolskaya pravda from 25 Dec. 1987 to 15 Feb. 1988.
[13]Artem Borovik, Afganistan: eshche raz pro voinu (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1990). Contents first published as 'Vstretimsya u trekh zhuravlei'. Also, 'Spryatannaya voina'.
[14]Petr Tkachenko, ed., Dorogie moi (Moscow: Profizdat, 1991).
[15]Tarasov, Moskvichi iz Kluba 'Dolg', also published as 'Afgantsy'.
[16]Aleksievich, 'Tsinkovye mal'chiki'. All subsequent references to Aleksievich will be from 'Tsinkovye mal'chiki' unless otherwise stated.

previous collection of Soviet women's accounts of duty in World War Two, she included her own personal observations and reactions. Petr Tkachenko edited another volume of 'documentary testimony' (dokumental'nye svidetel'stva) in the form of soldiers' memoirs and diaries entitled Afghanistan bolit v moei dushe (My Heart Grieves Over Afghanistan).[17] And A. P. Zhitnukhin assembled a broad array of literary material -- documents, accounts, short prose fiction, poetry -- for inclusion in Zvezda nad gorodom Kabulom (Star Over Kabul).[18] This collected edition generally espouses pro-military, conservative values, yet 'denies any pretence of presenting the "final truth"' about the war. One final work is mentioned which demonstrates the reach of publitsistika into the realm of politics and culture. A.A. Lyakhovsky and V.M. Zabrodin discuss Soviet intentions during the war in the light of recently published official government documents.[19] Tainy afganskoi voiny (Secrets of the Afghan War) purports to expose the Afghan war much as other recent investigations treat various infamous 'white spots' in Soviet historiography, such as the Stalinist labour camps, or the use of disciplinary battalions during the Great Patriotic War.

The works listed above and used as sources for this chapter are not all-inclusive; rather, I am using them only as a representative cross-section of publitsistika in order to demonstrate the changes which this genre has undergone. Below I shall discuss the details of the war which were uncovered by Soviet journalists, and conclude with a discussion of the works of Artem Borovik and Svetlana Aleksievich.

The early examples of publitsistika such as Stars of Valour reveal practically nothing about the war effort being carried out by the Red Army in Afghanistan, but starting in 1987, a composite picture of life may be assembled from this genre. The picture which was revealed was sometimes as grim as the previous depiction was optimistic. To begin with, once the ban on descriptions of Soviet soldiers in combat

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[17]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit v moei dushe.
[18]Zhitnukhin, Zvezda nad gorodom Kabulom.
[19]A. A. Lyakhovsky and V. M. Zabrodin, Tainy afganskoi voiny (Moscow: Planeta, 1991).

was lifted, it was acknowledged that Russian soldiers had committed tactical errors and suffered defeats in battle. During the 1984 Panjsher Valley campaign, for example, Soviet soldiers were killed by their own mines, which they had laid in the 1982 campaign. In another tragedy, Russian troops were mistakenly bombed by their own helicopters.[20] Moreover, one first-person recollection described a Soviet unit retreating under attack, and suffering from exhaustion when finally rescued.[21] And contrary to the picture of Soviets occupying forts while Afghan government troops engaged the enemy, the fighting turned out to be extraordinarily vicious. A Russian nurse routinely saw corpses of her countrymen with gouged eyes, severed limbs, and mutilated skin. Conversely, Russian soldiers spoke of shooting mujahedin prisoners of war, and noted the grisly custom of collecting strings of dried human ears.[22] Neither did the Soviets try any longer to cover up the losses inflicted on the native civilian population. Airborne assault troops sometimes looted villages;[23] in one court-martial, two soldiers were sentenced to death for murdering a merchant's family.[24] A Soviet eye-witness spoke of the killing of children, and in another tragedy, a frightened crowd of Afghan women who rushed at a Soviet outpost during an attack on their village were massacred.[25]

The Soviet soldier's perception of his mujahedin enemy now revealed frustration over having been caught in the crossfire of a civil, rather than an ideological, war. Russians became confused and frustrated after talking to native villagers who admitted having fought for the opposition in the summer, and who would return to guerrilla units during the following spring. 'What's to become of me?', asked one Afghan regular soldier of his Soviet counterpart. 'I'll serve my two years and return to the village. My father and my older brother are in the mountains. Where can I go? I'll

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[20]Borovik, Afganistan 123-24.
[21]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 53-62. See also, for example, 76-80.
[22]Aleksievich 12, 14.
[23]Borovik, Afganistan 158.
[24]Aleksievich 60.
[25]Borovik 267.

leave for the mountains as well.' Thus the regular Afghan soldier, dubbed a 'green' (zelenyi) was not trusted to any great degree. 'When we operated with the Afghan army,' said one Soviet with tactful understatement, 'there was often a leak of information.'[26] Another man remembers Afghans who refused to fight against their religious compatriots, saying instead to the Russians, 'You created the Revolution -- now you can defend it.' But nearly as unsettling were former members of the mujahedin now fighting for the Afghan government army. The Soviets prudently positioned them in alternate sequence inside their BTRs: one Soviet, one Afghan, etc. The Russian soldiers were well aware that those who switched sides once could still be operating as spies for the Islamic opposition parties.[27] Only the Afghan special forces were judged by Soviet soldiers to be reliable.[28] But in any case, the line between friend and foe was often more tenuous than presented in official literature: a Russian major once put his own disciplinary battalion, with Soviet military prisoners held on disciplinary or criminal charges, under the command of a captured mujahed prisoner who knew how to make bricks.[29]

The Russians also encountered great difficulties with certain features of the physical environment. Among the environmental obstacles most often noted by newly-arrived soldiers was the problem of dust, which hampered military operations such as helicopter landings and convoy transport. 'As for the roads in Afghanistan -- that's a topic in itself. First of all it means dust -- in your eyes, in your mouth, in every pore.'[30] There were also surface irrigation canals which the Soviets sometimes had to re-route or drain to prevent their vehicles from getting bogged down in muddy terrain.[31] And finally, the Soviets were forced to fight within so-called 'green zones' (zelenki), which were cultivated areas with vineyards or orchards usually flanking a

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[26]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 163. For the term 'green', see Aleksievich 24.
[27]Strel'tsova 12; Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 221, 224.
[28]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 135.
[29]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 42.
[30]Strel'tsova 156. See also Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 233.
[31]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 163.

river near a village. The mujahedin often used these familiar 'greens' as bases of operations, and the Soviets considered them to be dangerous areas. Moreover, underneath the 'green zones' could be found elaborate systems of irrigation tunnels stretching under villages and roadways, some as deep as fifteen metres and large enough to accommodate vehicles. The mujahedin used these tunnels as headquarters, weapons storehouses, and avenues of escape or ambush.[32] Afghan civilians presented unexpected surprises as well. A Soviet lorry driver crossing the border for the first time at night saw boulders placed along the highway, and occasional monstrous visions in the headlights. The boulders turned out to be Afghans sleeping on the verges, and the visions were the distinctively decorated Afghan lorries known as burbukhaiki, painted in the national tradition of bright colours and garish decals.[33]

Countering the claim that the Soviet people were unaware of the fighting in Afghanistan, or that parents willingly allowed their boys to serve there, are reports which showed the system of selection for combat duty to be riddled with corruption. At least one commander unofficially released a list of soldiers to be sent to Afghanistan, and then solicited bribes from parents -- up to 400 rubles -- to remove their sons' names from the list.[34] General Kutsenko, a well-known poet and Afghan War song-writer, accused merchants (torgovtsy) and powerful politicians of protecting their sons.[35] Although Kutsenko claimed that generals never engaged in such practices, resentment over their putative power to do so is reflected by the rumour concerning a general's wife who threatened her husband with divorce in order to keep their son out of Afghanistan.[36] One military driving instructor was reported to have been attacked at

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[32]Losoto 10. See also Bocharev, Russian Roulette 35.
[33]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 83 on poverty; 35 on the 'burbukhaiki'. The driver also gives fictitious Russian derivations for this Afghan word: 'bur -- znachit, burchat; bu --buistvo krasok, sveta, ukrashenii; khaiki -- znachit, dvizhushchiesya. Slovo eto chisto afganskoe i perevod sovsem drugoi, no my tak vosprinimali smysl etogo nazvaniya.' (35-36). See also Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 177; in an Afghan language unspecified by Verstakov , the word 'burbukhaika' apparently means 'schastlivogo puti'.
[34]Losoto 108.
[35]Strel'tsova 24.
[36]Losoto 25. The general supposedly refused, the son served, and the couple divorced.

a Soviet army post by outraged parents who did not want their sons sent to Afghanistan.[37]

Opposition to the war within the officer ranks was also not unknown. In one unit in Mongolia with fourteen eligible candidates from which three officers were to be chosen for duty in Afghanistan, more than half tried to refuse due to family obligations, and one even resigned from the Party in order not to go.[38] A major once reportedly refused to serve on ideological grounds: 'I'll defend the Motherland, but I won't go to Afghanistan.'[39] Another officer defied an order to advance given by a general with the retort, 'I won't send my youngsters into bullets'.[40] In the highest instance of dissent, General Rodionov, commmander of the 40th Army, objected to yet another Panjsher Valley campaign in 1986. He was overruled, and relieved of command.[41] Indeed, it turns out that Marshal N. V. Ogarkov, Chief of the General Staff, and his deputy Marshal Akhromeev, disagreed with but were overruled by Marshal Ustinov, the Defence Minister, on the original decision to send Soviet troops to Afghanistan in the first place.[42] For obvious reasons, none of these facts was publicised during the war, even though these officers could hardly be called dishonourable.

Instead, it seems that there was a sizeable group of enterprising officers who recognized such an assignment as a career-enhancing prospect. Even here, however, individual stories contradict the picture of central planning, preparation and performance which military institutions worldwide attempt to portray as typical. An episode is told of a lieutenant who volunteered to serve but was initially refused. He simply vanished from his unit, rode a lorry across the border, and managed to gain a

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[37]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 135.
[38]Strel'tsova 110-11.
[39]Aleksievich 48.
[40]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 29.
[41]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 172-74. Urban 208, records that General Rodionov relinquished command to General Gromov in November 1986, but does not mention that Rodionov was sacked. General Rodionov, incidentally, found himself at the centre of controversy three years later, when, as military commander and People's Deputy from Georgia, he ordered the crackdown during the 'Bloody Sunday' demonstration in Tbilisi on 9 April 1989. See Hedrick Smith 466.
[42]Artem Borovik, 'Afganistan: podvodya itogi', Ogonek 12 (1989): 6, interview with Army Chief of Staff General Valentin Varennikov.

position as platoon commander in a vehicle repair facility. Another soldier volunteered for duty in Afghanistan, but because he was a competent cook, his commander in the Soviet Union denied him permission. So the enterprising fellow distributed decorated Easter eggs one morning at mess breakfast, and found himself on the next plane headed south.[43] This image of a rebellious minority is reinforced by an account describing a particularly outspoken major. In the opinion of one admiring subordinate, the major was exiled to Afghanistan because the domestic military bureaucracy during the Brezhnev years could not tolerate such an officer.[44]

In contrast to the heroic images of warriors initially painted by the official press, and later re-varnished by a guilt-laden public, are the individual impressions of the participants themselves concerning the quality of the contingent sent to fight. One officer wondered why the induction authorities 'didn't look more closely at the quality of people they send? Often they turn out to be contraband dealers or drug addicts. Bribery, smuggling -- it goes on everywhere. Everything that is negative in the USSR by and large ends up in Afghanistan.'[45] One soldier talked about the scoundrels with whom he served, including a huge fellow who was found hiding under an extremely small table in the barracks tent during an enemy attack.[46] In another rather amusing memoir, a new officer recalls quickly being divested of illusions. Once in Afghanistan, his plane does not arrive as scheduled; his overcoat is stolen at the first stop; he discovers that his predecessor was a drunkard, and that another platoon commander has received a four-year jail sentence for dealing in contraband goods. Furthermore, all his senior troops supposedly have just recovered from jaundice, which precludes any duty

[43]Strel'tsova 88. I am reminded of a similar incident told to me by an American officer who as a young lieutenant wished to leave his job as an Officers Club manager in Texas in order to serve in Vietnam. On a Friday he removed from the refrigerator an ice-cream cake for an Officers' Wives Club party scheduled for the following Monday, and by Tuesday he had been reassigned to the Far East.
[44]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 42. Added motivation was probably supplied by the increased rate of pay and time credited toward retirement given to officers. See Aleksievich 42.
[45]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 140. A 'bitter' admission was also made by General Gromov: 'Up to 80% of new sergeants in Afghanistan could not be assigned to NCO duties [due to lack of preparation or motivation]. This doesn't just apply to combat duty; even in ordinary situations they couldn't do their jobs.' See A. Polyakov, 'Vosem' mesyatsev samostoyatel'nosti', Krasnaya zvezda 9 Sept. 1989: 2.
[46]Strel'tsova 51.

involving physical exertion.[47] And not only soldiers are criticized. It seemed to one captain that, in the first few years, 'the officers who ended up in Afghanistan -- not all, but the majority -- were those who had problems in their previous units'.[48] A soldier voiced general dissatisfaction with his officers: 'There are a fair number of professionals among them, but as for being decent people ...'[49]

Poor equipment also hampered the army throughout the war. Sleeping bags were not standard issue until the last years, and even then they fell apart because of poor quality. Neither did domestic factories provide any portable mountain tents, durable footware, or lightweight bulletproof jackets. One Soviet citizen wrote a letter to a newspaper editor describing two criminals who had been arrested on a city street wearing well-fashioned, hand-made bulletproof vests, and expressed indignation over the failure of the Soviet government to supply its soldiers with the equivalent.[50] Consequently men returned from combat missions with stolen socks, trainers, sleeping bags, and flak jackets. After donning their newly acquired kit, they 'bore little resemblance to Soviet soldiers'.[51] As it turns out, the boys sent to fight were not even issued with identification tags. After one incident in which a dead soldier could not be identified, troops were ordered to carry empty cartridge shells with a piece of paper inside detailing their name and unit.[52] More seriously, the contingent experienced problems with weapons and radios. The infantry fighting vehicle BMP-1 was not popular, since the ammunition on board tended to blow up if the vehicle struck a mine. And communications remained a major problem until the end of the war. 'Engineers from Moscow said [radio interference] was unavoidable due to mountain terrain', noted one soldier. 'But why did United Nations observers never have any problem? We later asked Moscow specialists, and they thought the UN used satellite

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[47]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 140-43.
[48]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 229.
[49]Strel'tsova 159.
[50]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 8-9. See also Losoto 105.
[51]Aleksievich 26.
[52]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 197.

communications. But that's even more perplexing: are they trying to tell us that the USSR doesn't have any satellites?'[53]

Combat aside, living conditions for the majority of troops certainly improved from the primitive level of 1980, but never seem to have been a priority for the central authorities. Initially, 'the conditions were very hard. Only after us did the men get tents and beds. But as for us ... we practically didn't take our boots off for the first half year.'[54] After the first year, soldiers came to live in a variety of quarters. At worst, they inhabited earthen dug-outs equipped with handmade chairs, tables, and bunkbeds, where the oven operated on diesel fuel, and a wick in an empty cartridge case provided light.[55] Otherwise they lived either in small, low-roofed tents with dug-out floors (suitable, say, for a three-man tank crew), or perhaps in huge rectangular barracks tents with several chimney stoves, sometimes subdivided by canvas walls within, and large enough for an infantry platoon of thirty men.[56] Officers' quarters ranged from flats in Kabul with air conditioners, showers, and individual kitchenettes, to tiny rooms in field barracks equipped only with an 'Afghan air conditioner', in which a bush sprinkled with water placed in the window frame replaced the glass, kept flies out and humidified the room.[57] Primarily, however, the officers lived in 'modules', single-story buildings with cement floor and rooms separated by plywood walls to either side of a single corridor. The rooms held dressers and cupboards, while the communal latrines had the added luxury of tiled walls.[58] Lights were kept off in modules except for the windowless toilet so that no target was presented to snipers at night. Such measures were taken seriously; a rocket struck an aircrew module near Kabul on 13 November 1988 and killed eleven men and wounded more than thirty.[59]

Sustenance was plentiful but notoriously poor. Besides potatoes, onions,

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[53]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 374.
[54]Strel'tsova 46.
[55][Tarasov], 'Afgantsy' 203.
[56]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 16.
[57]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 187, 212.
[58]Verstakov 324.
[59]Losoto 13; Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 216, 226.

radishes, and dried fruits, the food shipped in was almost all tinned, such as the infamous fish (stavrida) in tomato sauce. Rare deliveries of apples usually were distributed to the hospitals.[60] Although there was no beer (supplied through official channels, at any rate), milk, or sour cream, the troops were supplied with free cigarettes.[61] But resourceful soldiers did not restrict themselves to government shipments of food supplies delayed by bureaucratic incompetence. 'As far as oranges are concerned,' wrote one soldier to his parents, 'you're getting upset for no good reason. We pluck them from the trees, making our way through a small minefield where we know the paths.' At one outpost, the troops harvested cherries, pears, apples, apricots, and nuts from their own kitchen gardens.[62] And troops often supplemented their diet with 'wild sheep' -- into which classification fell any unfortunate animal separated from the flock by 'more than five metres'.[63]

Likewise, amenities at military posts were few, especially at the smaller outlying sites. As one ditty expresses it,

> Dve radosti v Afgane:
> pis'mo i banya.[64]
> (Just two things are nice 'beyond the river':
> A bathhouse visit, and from home, a letter.)

To indicate the low priority given to non-combat items, as late as December 1987 soldiers requested guitars, sporting goods, trainers, stationery, and paints. The commissary shops needed such basic items as sweets, wafers, biscuits, fruits, and tea, along with photographic paper and developer. By the end of the war, however, troops could spend their leisure time with a variety of activities, at least at the larger bases. For example, they could view Soviet television on satellite relay, or listen to the latest

[60]Losoto 33.
[61]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 112, 151.
[62]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 174, 155.
[63]Aleksievich 27.
[64]Losoto 17.

Russian and western rock songs on tape players purchased in local shops.[65] They also read books and newspapers at their post libraries, although in general the collections were meagre, so that officers often brought books for their men when returning from leave.[66] Outdoor activities included football matches, perhaps with the local Afghan garrison, or volleyball games, or an outdoor movie shown on a screen made of several bedsheets sewn together. One local commander even organized a talent show.[67]

But the overall lack of amenities meant that the problem of contraband transported by Soviet soldiers would bedevil the authorities throughout the decade of war. Privates received in pay only seven rubles a month, and sergeants only 36 rubles, so men obtained extra cash by selling weapons and ammunition to the local populace, then writing them off as lost. Soldiers also stole forks, spoons, and plates from the mess hall in order to sell them at the bazaars.[68] Incomes were paid in special checks, exchangeable for foreign goods and food at restricted hard currency stores.[69] But the conditions were ripe for exploitation, as one soldier complains:

> To this day I cannot understand how two little [Afghan] shops over the course of eight years continually supplied the officers and men of our garrison with whatever their hearts desired. And what was [the specially stocked Soviet commissary shop] 'Vneshposyltorg' good for? So that a couple of times a year -- on holidays -- they could hand out, according to prearranged priority lists, some black caviar, smoked sausage, and chocolates? ... Even in Afghanistan we managed to create deficit goods, and priority lists, and queues, and privileges.[70]

Goods imported by Afghan merchants for resale included the latest in Japanese cassette players, and English or American clothing fashions.[71] Thus at one internal inspection point, a naïve transportation officer was amazed to discover that his own convoy was transporting contraband goods of foreign manufacture such as jeans, scarves, skirts

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[65]Borovik, Afganistan 54.
[66]Tarasov 203.
[67]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 89.
[68]Borovik, Afganistan 157-58; Aleksievich 12.
[69]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 108, 204; Aleksievich 42, 58. A captain received a gross monthly wage of about 540 rubles -- double the standard salary; a civilian typist could expect 120 rubles a month.
[70]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 190.
[71]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 220.

and watches.[72] Indeed, illicit furs and illegal drugs were reportedly shipped back to the Soviet Union in coffins or beneath the undercarriages of armoured personnel carriers.[73] Drivers of petrol lorries enjoyed reputations for being ruble millionaries due to smuggling.[74] Even brand new 'uazik' jeeps were illegally diverted in Central Asia en route to Afghanistan.[75] Predictably, this traffic in stolen goods created its own contraflow, as military customs guards confiscated from returning soldiers such gifts as perfume, scarves and highly prized digital watches with calculators. These KGB troops were widely suspected of keeping valuables for themselves.[76]

Another topic rarely broached in the official press was the use of illegal drugs by Soviet soldiers. Soldiers spoke openly about a range of Central Asian derivatives of the hemp and poppy plants which came to be consumed by a broad cross-section of the army in Afghanistan. These drugs were known under a variety of names: anasha (marijuana), ter'yak (opium), chars (a mix of marijuana and opium), and plan (hashish).[77] Moreover, these substances, obtained in village bazaars or from the personal effects of the enemy slain, were used in combat situations, a phenomenon never before acknowledged by the official press. Besides using these drugs, the soldiers also drank vodka, even though it too was supposedly off limits for enlisted troops, and available only to officers from commissary stocks. The black market price for one bottle could reach thirty checks, or four months' salary for a private. Officers also were allowed to bring through customs two bottles of vodka, four bottles of wine and unlimited beer, so they filled wine and beer bottles with vodka as well. Besides vodka, methyl alcohol used in aircraft systems went into a concoction called shpaga ('sword'), and anti-freeze was stolen from the motor pool for personal consumption.[78] Another source of contraband alcoholic spirits was found in field hospitals. So much

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[72] Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 144.
[73] Aleksievich 56; Borovik, Afganistan 185.
[74] Aleksievich 84.
[75] Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 39.
[76] Aleksievich 26; Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 8-9.
[77] Borovik 273; Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 220.
[78] Aleksievich 41.

was medicinal alcohol in demand that it sometimes served as a medium of exchange for deficit commoditites in garrison -- ranging from wood and fuel, coal, paint, paper, and cement, to spare parts for motors, and uniforms.[79]

Along with their weapons, soldiers brought to Afghanistan the ritual behaviour associated with dedovshchina, the harassment of new rank and file troops by their seniors. This unofficial abuse of hierarchy, according to a theory voiced by a character in Yury Polyakov's semi-autobiographical story 'Sto dnei do prikaza' ('One Hundred Days Until the Order'), entered its modern phase in 1967, when the length of conscription in the army was decreased from three to two years. The seniors who were compelled to serve a third year directed their resentment at the new conscripts in the form of humiliating demands, thus starting a chain reaction which resulted in a deeply entrenched system of oppression. The officers, though never directly participating, tolerated the existence of 'non-regulation relations between soldiers' (as it was occasionally referred to in official sources) either as a control mechanism, or through indifference, or because junior officers were powerless to prevent it.

Upon reporting to his regular unit of assignment after basic training, a new soldier not only assumed his official rank of private, but also the unofficial rank of 'son' (syn). For the next six months he would be required to serve as batman for the senior enlisted (non-officer) personnel in his unit. (Even if the new soldier had attended a special course after basic training which conferred upon him the official rank of sergeant, he would still find himself subject to the pressures of dedovshchina.) After six months the soldier became a 'starling' (skvorets), a rank which, in Polyakov's satirical estimation, is distinguished from the raw recruit 'only by greater life experience and the hope of future rights'. After twelve months a soldier graduated to the rank of 'lemon' (limon), at which point he unofficially exercised direct control over all troops with less time in service, and deferred to those with more. At eighteen months he became a 'granddad' (dedushka or starik), an undisputed ruler within his

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[79]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 189.

unit, possessing 'an ocean of rights and deferring to no one but his commanders -- and then only with a feeling of special pride'. After finally receiving his demobilization order at around the two-year mark, he was known as a 'demob' (dembel') while awaiting departure. In this status he no longer possessed rights, but rather was tolerated by the new generation of 'granddads' as a 'civilian who by a trick of fate happens to be wearing a military uniform'.[80]

In return for his subordinate's obedience, a senior soldier would be expected to lead the junior troops into battle.[81] As an example of noblesse oblige, a story is told of demobs climbing off their departure aeroplane and volunteering to reinforce a besieged position near the airport in place of some newly-arrived, inexperienced troops.[82] But the price for this protection was sometimes high, as one recruit described in a letter.

I'm now commanded by the 'granddads', such degenerate scum I've never seen before, I'm becoming just like them ... If somebody steals something from you, the commanders tell you to steal something back ... Mum, if you can, send me about ten rubles, there's not enough to eat because the 'granddads' each eat enough for three. There's no water, they restrict us to our fatigues during the freezing night, and then make us put on our overcoats and boil during the day ... they give us enough water for only three minutes in the bathhouse, you can't wash, and then they chase us outside -- where we freeze. To be truthful, our living conditions here resemble a concentration camp. ...[83]

This youngster soon learned that incoming mail passed through the hands of the senior troops, who routinely confiscated anything of value. 'Don't send any money (especially in letters)', he warns his mother in his next letter, 'they'll take it all and burn

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[80]Yu. Polyakov 55. The nomenclature for this latter-day unofficial 'Table of Ranks' varied according to unit. For example, the 'sons' were also known as 'molodoi' (Aleksievich 28), 'dukh' ('spook' or 'ghost', identical to the slang name given to the mujahedin by the Soviet troops) (Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 106), and 'salaga' or 'salabon' (Yu. Polyakov 55). The 'lemons' were also called 'gus'' ('goose') (Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 106) or 'shnurok' ('shoelace') (Yu. Polyakov 48). And in some units, only after demobilization did the senior troops ('starik') become known as 'dedushka'. I should emphasize that incidents taken from Yury Polyakov occur in a work of fiction, and although probably semi-autobiographical, do not necessarily depict actual events. But the appearance of the story as a sort of exposé, and the similarity of events described in the story compared to events portrayed in other works of fiction, lend Polyakov's publication an aura of publitsistika. In fact, one soldier, quoted in an official military publication, said that Polyakov's story was generally accurate. See Aleksandr Fomenko's interview with Aleksei Chikishev, 'My vypolnili svoi dolg...', Podvig 34 (1989): 14. See also Dalziel, The Soviet Military and Glasnost'.

[81]Strel'tsova 114.

[82]Yu. Polyakov 56.

[83]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 195-96. It must be noted that in subsequent letters this soldier wrote that he had weathered the storm and felt himself now to be stronger than before.

the letter, the bastards!'[84] Otherwise, tasks for the new troops ranged from the utilitarian -- sewing in collar linings or washing clothes for their superiors -- to the entertaining. For example, new soldiers were required to ask permission of light switches before extinguishing them. In another instance, an entire team of privates was marshalled to satisfy the whim of a veteran. As one boy imitated a train whistle, four others gently rocked the soldier's cot, while several more waved branches outside the window to simulate a journey through the Russian countryside.[85] Not only humiliation, however, but extortion could be encountered. Privates were forced to 'purchase' ordinary clay bricks for three rubles from senior sergeants, and veterans stole hats and belts from recent arrivals in order to return home in new uniforms.[86] The mandatory initiation rites, including flogging with a belt (one hit for every month served) and mandatory gifts for the departing senior troops, also occurred at every stage. Only during a special celebration marking the date at which senior troops had one hundred days remaining, was a sort of Saturnalia observed. The newest troops occupied the best seats near the windows in the dining hall, were the first to be served food, and had their bread buttered by the veterans.[87]

Not all soldiers moved up the unofficial hierarchy. If the senior troops considered a man to be a coward, or unwilling to submit to the rules of dedovshchina, they relegated him to the rank of 'permanent son' (vechnye syny) for his entire army term. This 'child' or 'weakling' (chados) would be forced to wash dishes, clean barracks, run errands, and be at the continual disposal of his overlords, managing perhaps three hours of sleep a night. Torture and humiliation could accompany that degraded state. One 'permanent son' at a remote post was starved for two weeks for serving a cup of tea with a fly in it to a senior soldier, while another was forced to dig a

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[84]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 196.
[85]Yu. Polyakov 55, 67.
[86]Aleksievich 26.
[87]Yu. Polyakov 58. A similar custom may also be observed in certain British army units, wherein Christmas lunch is served by senior NCOs and officers to the junior troops. Another similar ritual is 'Gunfire' at Christmas morning reveille, wherein seniors wake the troops and serve them tea or coffee spiked with rum. Warrant Officer Class II Chris Lawrence, Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment, personal interview, Oxford, 10 February 1992.

pit and climb into it, after which his tormentors urinated upon him.[88] On the other hand, those considered to be suffering from merely temporary battle fatigue could be transferred to bathhouse or kitchen duty. After two or three months, says one veteran, these soldiers usually requested to go back on patrol.[89]

Far from being a fraternity of equals, the Soviet army like any large organization had its own job-related social hierarchy. The airborne assault troops and long-range reconnaissance patrols (desantniki, razvedchiki) occupied the top rung of the ladder. In fact, one elite paratrooper mentally divided the army into only two groups: first, the desantniki, like himself, and second, the solyar, which meant everybody else of inferior status.[90] The desantniki were elite units ranging from three to thirty men whose patrols into the mountains could last up to a week or more. The men avoided contact with the local population, travelled by night, and slept by day.[91] These soldiers coped with exhausting marches in extreme heat and bitter cold, and engaged the enemy on unfamiliar territory. As expressed in anonymous doggerel,

> Bog pridumal lyubov' i druzhbu,
> Chert -- parashyut i desantnuyu sluzhbu.[92]
> (God thought up things like friendship and love,
> The Devil thought up parachuting down from above.)

Helicopter pilots shared an equally high status. These pilots held the rank of praporshchik, a tsarist rank re-introduced into the Soviet army in 1972 to be held by those carrying out the functions of warrant officer or senior non-commissioned officer in modern western armies.[93] Warrant officers soon gained a reputation for being

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[88] Aleksievich 26, 61, 68.
[89] Strel'tsova 114.
[90] Aleksievich 70. The speaker said he did not know the origin of the word solyar. It could be derived from the word solyarka, the colloquial term for diesel fuel, which was used in some tent heaters, and produced a terrible odour.
[91] Losoto 19; Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 133.
[92] Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 23.
[93] Praporshchik was the lowest commissioned rank in the tsarist infantry (corresponding to the civilian Kollezhskii registrator, 14 klass, or cavalry kornet). The modern-day praporshchik is not commissioned, but occupies a rank between enlisted and officer, corresponding to a warrant officer. The rank replaces the starshina, or sergeant-major, although the designation starshina is still used for

resourceful, rich, and able to attract women, not least because helicopter airmanship grew more daring as the war progressed.[94] A claim has been made for the first ever heliborne insertion of troops into a combat zone at night, on 28 May 1983.[95] Warrant officers also ran the supply depots as quartermasters, a duty which gave them first access to goods shipped to the troops.

Moving down the social hierarchy, the airborne troops and pilots were followed by tankmen and artillery personnel; rear-echelon non-combat troops occupied the bottom rung.[96] Non-combatants such as lorry drivers and sappers nevertheless were extremely important to the Soviet war effort in Afghanistan.[97] This conflict without fronts reduced the Russians to point defence of main bases located on supply arterials, smaller support posts (zastava) along the roads, and tiny observation outposts (vynosnoi post) which formed the outer ring of defences.[98] Arterials thus became critical: the main Salang Highway was dubbed the 'Road of Life' (Doroga zhizni) because of the vital supplies running along its length, recalling the 'Road of Life' across Lake Ladoga into the besieged city of Leningrad during the Second World War.[99] And because of the army's reliance on Soviet supplies delivered over the few main highways, drivers and sappers played a critical role in delivering supplies and ensuring the safety of the roads. Such was their importance that vehicles were

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the senior praporshchik in any given unit, or as a popular form of address by any soldier toward any warrant officer. For pre-revolutionary ranks see Table of Ranks in, for example, N. G. Okhotin and G. Yu. Sternin, Nashi, spisannye s natury russkimi: prilozhenie k faksimil'nomu izdaniyu (Moscow: Kniga, 1986) 113. For translation of old rank, note use of praporshchik in Lev Tolstoy, Voina i mir (Minsk: Mastatskaya literatura, 1987) 56, and its translation as (cavalry) 'cornet' instead of the more precise (infantry) 'ensign' in Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970) 35. For modern-day ranks, see Christopher Donnelly, Red Banner (Coulsden, Surrey: Jane's Information Group, 1988) 181-82. For modern-day popular terms of address, see Yu. Polyakov 47 ('...Ya ispuganno otkryvayu glaza i vizhu starshinu batarei -- praporshchika Vysovnya.')

[94]Aleksievich 59. For an account of a helicopter mission, see Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 89-96.

[95]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 247.

[96]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 46.

[97]For example, an acknowledgement of the sappers' role may be found in Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 117-18.

[98]Losoto 17.

[99]Dynin, Posle Afganistana 11; also Losoto 100. By way of contrast, the Kishim-Faizabad arterial was known as the 'Road of Death' because of attacks along its length. See P. Studenikin, 'Iz Afganskogo bloknota: v strane gor i nadezhd', Pravda 14 April 1981: 6, as cited in Hart 63.

stencilled with the names of the drivers' home towns, and, like fighter aircraft, were adorned with stars denoting the number of successful transport missions completed.

A myriad of complaints were voiced in the trenches about the handling of the war by the central authorities. The paperwork involved in documenting damage to a vehicle was criticized by one soldier. He protested, 'Can you believe that when a jeep catches fire during a battle, I've got to run over and take a photograph in order to write it off? ... There are land mines everywhere! Does Moscow understand what's going on down here?'[100] In another painful example of bureaucratic demands, Soviet troops once had to transport dead mujahedin together with their own wounded in order to confirm a body count of slain enemy soldiers. And far from being glorified, Soviet fatalities were transported home on aeroplanes known as 'Black Tulips' which notoriously arrived and departed at night.[101] Volunteer escorts could add two weeks of extra leave to their journey, but hardly anyone ever volunteered for this unpleasant task. Instead, regimental musicians, who were considered expendable, accompanied coffins back to the Soviet Union.[102] Tales of escort officers being stoned to death by avenging parents probably did not help, but no doubt reflected the guilt and alienation experienced by soldiers returning home more than any actual danger faced by escort troops.[103] But there are many stories describing the misplacement of bodies in coffins. And one mother was sent incorrect information with her son's name misspelled, saying that her boy was supposedly still alive and assigned to a unit. In fact, he had been killed in action.[104]

Unlike the situation after the Great Patriotic War, the aftermath of the conflict in Afghanistan was marked by vocal resentment at the role played by three previously

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[100]Losoto 35.
[101]Aleksievich 63. The funerary bureau in Tashkent was called 'The Black Tulip', and the name attached itself to the aeroplanes carrying the casualties. See Nikolai Ivanov, 'Ogranichennyi kontingent', Sovetskii voin 14 (1991): 13.
[102]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 225.
[103]Borovik, Afganistan 160.
[104]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 193.

unassailable governmental organizations. First, the security troops of the KGB earned a high degree of opprobrium. As administrators of procedural limitations on combat engagement, these non-combat officers bore the brunt of the foot soldiers' complaints over 'not being allowed to fight'. These security forces were also resented for niggling mission debriefings during combat operations, and customs inspections once the soldiers departed for home.[105] Second, a political division within the supposedly monolithic body of Soviet military Party representatives compounded the bureaucratic problem. The Russian leadership found itself becoming enmeshed in Afghan domestic political conflicts, and thus divided in sympathy between the warring Khalq and Parcham factions of the Afghan Communist Party (PDPA). This conflict contributed to the failure of government forces to unify in the face of the mujahedin threat, while pitting Soviet party officials against one another as well.[106] And finally, the Red Army political officer (politrabotnik; also known as the zampolit, or commander's deputy for political affairs) also received less than unanimous praise for his role in combat units. This reflected a profound change from the leadership provided during the Great Patriotic War, when German officers acknowledged that the 'unqualified obedience' to political commissars was a determining factor in the Red Army victory over the Nazis.[107] Instead, in Afghanistan the zampolit came to represent a distant, unsympathetic Kremlin, but he no longer possessed the power of life and death over his troops and commanders. The political officer was labelled a 'cinderella' by some; another nickname given to his naval counterpart was 'the passenger'.[108] One soldier revealed more about the general consensus on these Communist Party representatives than he did about the individual he was praising with the comment, 'He wasn't a political officer, he was a genuine commissar'.[109] This speaker was quite opinionated,

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[105]Strel'tsova 47-48.
[106]Losoto 35, 66; Borovik, Afganistan 16.
[107]U. S. Army, Russian Combat Methods 5.
[108]Aleksievich 26. One of the favourite slights in military parlance seems to be names which portray a person as passive rather than active; hence, for example, U.S. Air Force flight deck crews may call all other aircrew members 'strap-hangers', likening them to commuters on the underground.
[109]Strel'tsova 113. 'Commissar' was the designation used for political officers from 1918 until the post-WWII period.

saying that there had been a wide gap between word and deed among those politrabotniki whom he had met in Afghanistan.[110]

The status of the political officers was not enhanced by the 'hearts and minds' propaganda campaign conducted throughout the countryside. A general describes the three stages through which tactics for this campaign evolved. In the early years, an armoured column with loudspeakers mounted on top of vehicles -- named by Soviet soldiers the 'Alla Pugacheva' after the popular singer -- would arrive unannounced at a village, followed by lorries filled with grain or fuel. But this sudden show of power proved counterproductive. In the second phase, political officers and unit commanders began meeting with village mullahs prior to the arrival of 'agitprop' personnel. In the end, villages were notified in advance, and unarmed Soviet soldiers were used to distribute salt, paper, pencils, and paraffin to the populace. Soviet propagandists conducted discussions on current events, explained the Soviet army role in Afghanistan, and showed films about contemporary Soviet life. A doctor would accompany the unit in order to care for the sick, and Soviet women -- Tajiks or Turkmen --proselytized among the Afghan female population by combining lectures on ideology with lessons in hygiene, or perhaps a contest for the most attractive hairstyling. There were isolated instances of individual initiative; one captain installed electric lights for a village in return for resistance against the mujahedin. Primarily, however, contact between rural populations and the Soviet army seems to have been through these agitprop units in their attempt to spread the gospel of revolution.[111] Their efforts on the whole seemed to be unsuccessful. One major ruefully observed: 'If we were an occupying army, how could we have fed them, given them medicine? We enter a village -- they're overjoyed ... as we leave, they're just as happy ... that's something I never understood. Why did they always seem so happy?'[112]

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[110]For an account of the political disillusionment of a zampolit who served in Afghanistan, see Gary Lee and Rick Atkinson, 'Apostasy in the Ranks: Even a Political Officer Says Lenin Made Mistakes', International Herald Tribune 23 Nov. 1990: 3.

[111]Strel'tsova 101-04; Losoto 16, 23-24.

[112]Aleksievich 66. I employ this observation as an example of rural resistance to outside influences, and the insulation provided by traditional Afghan 'hospitality'. This shield is probably the same one

Soviet ethnic minorities received both positive and negative attention from Russian observers in the era of glasnost. Official statistics reveal that non-Russians as a conglomerate suffered approximately the same number of casualties as Russians (6,697 vs. 6,888), and that Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Belorussians, and Tatars suffered the highest losses in absolute terms.[113] Representatives of many national groups are mentioned as having taken part in the war, and some soldiers' accounts match the earlier official publicity which conveyed the message that a multi-ethnic army worked well in Afghanistan. 'Today a group of soldiers departed with a cargo load. Six men -- six nationalities.'[114] Likewise, a soldier mentions in a letter that his detachment includes an Uzbek and a Turkmen; in his diary, another man observes 'two Georgians in a BTR'; and a third writes home that his senior sergeant is a Bashkir.[115] Another man recalled that his unit had soldiers from across the Soviet Union, including Russia, Belorussia, and Ukraine.[116] One decorated officer expressed his opinion that the Soviet Tajiks made excellent fighters.[117]

These references could highlight racial heterogeneity as an anomalous condition, considered worthy of mention either by a letter writer or by a compiler intent on propaganda. But accounts of racial tension and unrest are also to be found. The purported ferocity of the Tajiks receives support of a different form in the legend of an ex-Soviet soldier named Kazbek Hudalov, who reportedly deserted to the mujahedin. According to the story, he assembled a dozen Tajiks who had similarly deserted, and

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that agitprop units would have encountered, even though the speaker in this case is not a political officer.

[113]Lyakhovsky and Zabrodin 213-15. The authors quote a figure released by the General Staff of 13,833 total 'deaths, [including] losses from wounds and disease'. They also provide a breakdown of casualties by nationality, including 6,888 Russians, which yields a difference of 6,945 non-Russians. The total number of deaths of the thirty-seven non-Russian nationalities listed (including an 'all others' category), however, provides a total of only 6,697. The discrepancy is not explained. Also, despite the approximately equal numbers of deaths of both Russians and non-Russians, a list of Heroes of the Soviet Union reveals that 70% of the winners were Russians (50 out of 71) (Lyakhovsky and Zabrodin 207-09).

[114]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 86.

[115]In order: Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 98; Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 21; Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 99.

[116]Strel'tsova 115.

[117]Chikishev 13.

led them in attacks against Afghan and Soviet outposts until the winter of 1988, when he disappeared without trace into the Panjsher Valley.[118] A Russian defector to the United States claimed that, even though a sergeant, he had received continual beatings by two Kazakh soldiers while serving in Afghanistan, and that the violence was a major factor in his decision to escape to the West.[119] In any case, even conservative journalists were now willing to publicize opinions that reflected ethnic dissent within the military. One soldier's letter is quoted: 'out of our entire unit of thirty-one fellows, the Ukrainians, Belorussians and Russians make up a total of seven, while all the rest --Uzbeks -- are worms.'[120] A company commander describes a group of Uzbeks who terrorized the Russian minority in his previous unit until he applied 'reverse terror'.[121] Thus, the official press was no longer painting a picture of racial harmony within the Soviet military.[122]

Soldiers' relations with the Soviet women who served in Afghanistan also generated controversy after the war. The women worked as barbers, cooks, telephone operators, typists, waitresses in snack bars, and they also comprised 70% of nurses, dentists, and doctors in medical brigades.[123] Generally, like the soldiers, the women were quite young, from 17-20 years of age.[124] Women were not stationed at roadside

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[118]Borovik, Afganistan 206-07. I emphasize that this is an unconfirmed legend more indicative of attitudes than any actual occurrence. Legends of this type are humourously alluded to in a short story by Eduard Pustynin, 'Afganets', Znamya 12 (1991): 105. The narrator states: 'I also revealed to everyone the story about our soldier from the Caucasus, who defected to the spooks and became leader of a group of bandits. He had his own harem, and he levied a heavy tax on the local population. And finally the spooks themselves removed him. I don't know where that story came from, and even now I can't separate truth from fiction in it.'

[119]Borovik, Afganistan 197-98.

[120]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 195.

[121]Borovik, Afganistan 149.

[122]On a related note of ethnic hostility is the myth of the so-called 'Black Storks', alleged to be a highly trained guerrilla band of Pakistani, West European, and Arab mercenaries fighting for the Afghan opposition. They were rumoured to have operated around Bagram and Kandahar. There was yet another tale of a 'Negro dressed in white' who led a fanatical band of mujahedin in combat. See Sergei Ionin, 'Poiskakh geroya', Podvig 34 (1989): 140-41. Chikishev, the veteran being interviewed, is quick to point out that these stories are of doubtful veracity. A band of fanatical 'Black Storks' is mentioned in Nikolai Ivanov, 'Den' za tri', 'Al'kor' prinimaet vyzov (Moscow: Patriot, 1991) 3, but these are mujahedin who supposedly are under a sentence of death from which they may be pardoned only through rapacity in battle.

[123]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 39; Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 85.

[124][Tarasov] 197. Compare a nurse's impresssion that the men she treated in Afghanistan were aged '18, 19, the commanders were 22-23, rarely 30.' Losoto 114.

posts or at remote mountain outposts, nor were nurses assigned to airborne assault units.[125] At large bases, however, they faced the same dangers from attack as everyone else. One nurse fired a machine gun while under enemy attack, and received the medal 'For Meritorious Combat Services'.[126] Some women served in sapper battalions.[127]

Medical care, then, was predominately accomplished by women, and nurses worked well under extremely difficult conditions. According to official statistics, 93% of wounded troops received initial medical treatment within thirty minutes, and a doctor's aid within six hours.[128] Anecdotal evidence paints a less sanguine portrait of the actual care received. A nurse recalls using a single syringe for many patients, and blames much loss of life on lack of medicine in hospital and inadequate training of medical orderlies in the field.[129] In fact, medical supplies on missions were often limited to bandages,[130] and disease was so widespread that jaundice and malaria were considered ordinary afflictions.[131] Corruption in the medical administration must be added to the list of problems, as combat losses were often fraudulently attributed to food poisoning or vehicular accidents in order to suppress reports of fighting.[132] Despite -- or because of -- these daunting circumstances, soldiers thought highly of nurses. One veteran fondly remembers a nurse violating regulations on the flight home to allow the invalid passengers to share a cigarette and pieces of watermelon.[133] The poet Aleksandr Karpenko recalled in an interview that he experienced the 'love of his life' with a nurse who cared for him while he recovered from injuries.[134]

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[125]Losoto 21.
[126]Dynin, Posle Afganistana 47.
[127]Okulov 6.
[128]Dynin, Posle Afganistana 48.
[129]Aleksievich 15.
[130]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 139.
[131]Strel'tsova 47.
[132]Aleksievich 14-15.
[133]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 131-132.
[134]Aleksandr Karpenko, personal interview, Moscow, 27 Sept. 1991. Opinion as to the frequency and longevity of marriages arising from duty in Afghanistan is inconclusive. One civilian female worker believes that most women volunteered for duty with the purpose of marrying (Aleksievich 59). Dynin states that one family described in his book 'was not the only one to have its origins in Afghanistan' (Posle Afganistana 47), while Bocharov contends the opposite, that very few nurses who

All women inevitably came under great pressure for sex in such a male-dominated environment. According to a civilian female, upon arrival at their duty stations, women were assigned to officers like slaves at auction.[135] Some women suggested that it seemed to be deliberate governmental policy to send so many females to Afghanistan, 'or else why was there one cleaning woman for every two or three modules, or one librarian for each couple of dozen ragged books?' A soldier's lexicon evolved to classify women according to their sexual relations with the men. For example, a bochkarevka was a woman who slept with a high-ranking officer, so named because of the quarters the officers inhabited, which were colloquially named bochki because of their resemblance to railroad cars. Other women were known as chekistki, women who supplemented their salary with checks (cheki) for prostitution. And the soldiers' repertoire of humour based on sex included the joke in which the ugly witch Baba Yaga visits Afghanistan and is treated like Vasilisa the Beautiful.[136] The custom arose for women to assume the surnames of lovers, as if married, in order to deter potential suitors, and to prevent jealousies from arising in the camps. If women became pregnant, abortions were available at the Soviet hospital in Kabul.[137]

In contrast to relationships between Soviet men and women, there seems to have been minimal contact between Russian soldiers and the indigenous female population. Consistent with the traditional isolation of women in Islamic societies relative to western secular nations, several accounts mention village women running away at the sight of soldiers.[138] Soldiers' opinions and myths reinforce the impression that this separation was nearly total. One veteran told me that Afghan village women,

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volunteered for the purpose of marrying actually succeeded in doing so (Russian Roulette 93). No sources or statistics are cited to support any of these contentions.

[135]Aleksievich 22. This 'auction', presumably for sexual purposes, thus differs from the traditional procedure wherein military 'buyers' choose newly arrived conscripts from operational considerations only. For an innocuous description of this latter procedure as applied to women during World War Two, see Aleksievich, War's Unwomanly Face (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988) 168. If procedures during the two wars resembled one another at any time, or in certain locations, War's Unwomanly Face gives no hint.

[136]Aleksievich 68, 39, 24. The name 'chekistka' gains irony from the play on words with 'chekist', the Lenin-era designation for a member of the Bolshevik secret police.

[137]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 190.

[138]For example, see Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 212.

even had they been willing, were physically filthy and therefore undesirable.[139] Another account describes how Afghan women, perhaps observing the social dictates of Pushtunwali, gave food to hungry Soviet soldiers on patrol, but were stoned to death by Afghan men after the soldiers departed.[140] Similar tales of local women and children being tortured for showing friendship to the Soviets can also be encountered in anecdotal form. True or not, these examples of popular mythology seem to confirm that soldiers maintained very little commerce with Afghan women. One commentator asks why there has not appeared one single story of romance between a Soviet soldier and a native Afghan woman.[141] Afghan children, on the other hand, were renowned for fearlessness and ingenuity. One soldier remembered what he called a legendary example of a boy who hopped aboard a lorry as a column drove past, detached the spare tyre and kicked it off, and then jumped to the ground to recover the tyre so that he could sell it at the bazaar.[142] But children were also seen as a threat; various stories recount the soldiers' paranoia concerning children who putatively attached explosives to vehicles.

In contrast to the picture provided by the media of high morale and unwavering faith in ultimate victory, the soldiers themselves were not uniformly optimistic. Even at an early stage, some soldiers doubted the political expediency of the invasion. Soldiers were expecting to participate in a temporary peacekeeping operation, but by August 1980, one private had written in his diary:

> The shelling of the column continues, the bandits now have got mortars. The situation clearly isn't improving, even though the newspapers say that Afghanistan has already constructed socialism. Insurrection continues, if not in one place, then another. More and more of our lads die with each passing day, and there's no simple explanation -- for what?[143]

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[139]Viktor Ershev, Afghan war veteran, personal interview, Moscow, 11 Oct. 1991. This observation, of course, does not address the issue of why an objection to filth has never prevented any army in history from engaging in fraternization or rapine.

[140]Aleksievich 21.

[141]Bocharov, Russian Roulette 179.

[142]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 220.

[143]Strel'tsova 30-31; Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 102. At least one diplomat said that he felt similar confusion over the proper Soviet role; see Strel'tsova 79; also Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 187-88.

One year later, disillusion had grown deeper for some. One letter writer described a populace that:

> doesn't even know that a revolution has taken place, that they have a new government, that a new life has begun, and so on ... We seize bread, rice, horses from the basmachi and give them to the peasants, but they won't take them, they're afraid that we've poisoned the food. In each village there is a mullah (like a village elder), and they agitate against us ... And meanwhile we chase after the basmachi in the mountains, and protect the peasants; in short, there's much which is incomprehensible.[144]

One saying succinctly expressed a certain cynicism that every soldier could understand. 'A clever fellow came to Afghanistan to make a living; a handsome fellow came to woo the women; and the foolish fellow came to win the war.'[145]

Discouragement inevitably set in during the 1988 retreat of the defeated army. As Soviets abandoned their outposts during the final withdrawal, Afghans rushed in to strip the roadside quarters of mattresses, blankets, and boots.[146] Another melancholy view of the final months is provided by a soldier stationed in Kabul, who by August 1988 had grown accustomed to seeing English film crews in the streets. 'I have little work to do', he wrote. 'When we'll pull out, I don't know. Various rumours, but I think it will be soon. I don't go to the shops anymore. In fact, we don't go into the city anymore either. A patrol might pick you up, and all sorts of unpleasant things follow.'[147] Artem Borovik provides another, perhaps overly dramatic yet nevertheless eerie description of wandering through a deserted Soviet hospital on the eve of departure in 1989.[148] These impressions provide a counterweight to the well-rehearsed cessation of military activities on 15 February 1989, when General Gromov, the 40th Army Commander, escorted his smiling son across the 'Bridge of Friendship' over the Amu Darya River.[149]

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[144]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 34. The term basmachi, meaning 'bandits', as applied by the Russians to the rebellious native inhabitants of Central Asia during the Soviet reconquest of that area in the 1920s, was also used to refer to the mujahedin.

[145]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 173.

[146]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 12-13.

[147]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 188-89.

[148]Borovik, Afganistan 111-12.

[149]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 12-13. This contrast belongs to a writer named Yuri Teplov, whose remarkably frank essay forms the introduction to Petr Tkachenko's book. The introduction (referred to

The men and women who served in Afghanistan were doubtless happy at the prospect of returning home, but once having crossed the border, either by aeroplane to Tashkent or by lorry through Termez, a disillusioning homecoming sometimes awaited them. 'I won't describe here how we finally managed to get home to the [Soviet] Union; the majority of 'afgantsy' are already familiar with the ordeal', says one man simply.[150] But writer Yury Teplov did reveal a more discouraging story about the troops who were brought home prior to 15 February 1989. Many soldiers were discharged no more than twenty kilometres across the border and left to fend for themselves, without food, transport, or accommodation. No arrangements had been made for this massive influx of troops, and the local train station, according to Teplov, resembled a bazaar in which a continuous brawl was taking place. A thriving black market quickly established itself at the drop-off point to fleece the soldiers of any property they had managed to bring out with them; food, alcohol, and prostitutes were used to lure them. Some soldiers were victimized by violence, necessitating the arrest of speculators and smugglers. But this was of little comfort to veterans who could not find seats on northbound trains and aircraft without recourse to prohibitively expensive bribes. This entire experience of the soldiers' return has already formed the subject of several works of literature about the war, and may prove to be a significant future theme in capturing the meaning of the conflict for its participants.[151]

Once home, many men found themselves wanting to re-enlist for duty in Afghanistan out of alienation and frustration.[152] As one veteran expressed his disenchantment with the grey existence of Soviet life: 'Only after I returned home did I become a prisoner of war.'[153] Another man couched his alienation from his fellow citizens in linguistic terms, noting that after his military service, his speech included

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again immediately below) is all the more noteworthy as Teplov is also the author of an earlier highly propagandistic book about the war entitled 'Granatovyi tsvet', discussed in the next chapter.

[150]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 225.

[151]Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 12-13.

[152]Strel'tsova 105.

[153]Strel'tsova 163.

words like bakshish, khanum, shuravi, and khub. He felt that he was speaking a foreign language called 'Afghan-Ukrainian' which was understood only by other veterans.[154] A civilian education specialist working in Afghanistan said that life for Russians was better there than in the Soviet Union. In Afghanistan an individual's potential could at least be imagined, but in the Soviet Union, the forces of stagnation were too powerful.[155] This alienation was exacerbated by the bureaucratic indifference which many veterans encountered. One man was denied a residence permit in Moscow because his mother had died while he was in Afghanistan, and his incorrectly completed paperwork failed to document his disability.[156] Another veteran was placed on a ten-year waiting list for a flat, and forced into a long struggle to collect the necessary documents to prove that he too was disabled.[157] Bureaucratic indifference was blamed for suicides among returning veterans, such as that of an ex-sergeant who jumped into a ravine after having been denied his benefits, or the attempted self-immolation of a veteran named Pavel Danilkin of Pokrov who likewise despaired over bureaucratic indifference.[158] 'Others have committed suicide; is this a psychological phenomenon?' questions a commentator.[159]

Women who served in Afghanistan suffered from the same problems as their male compatriots after returning home. According to one woman, female volunteers were promised a one-room cooperative flat upon termination of service, but the promise was never fulfilled. Indeed, many received no benefits at all, since the government claimed that they had volunteered as civilians.[160] Many nurses departed from Afghanistan without official recognition; as in military documentation for men, the location of duty was left blank on their personnel records. The only putative evidence

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[154][Tarasov] 217. The words mean 'bribe' or 'gift', 'woman', 'Soviets', and 'good'.
[155]Strel'tsova 125.
[156][Tarasov] 215.
[157]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 250-51. See also Dynin, Posle Afganistana 77-96 for a similar account.
[158]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 229; Strel'tsova 104.
[159]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 252. Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 309 claims that officers who served in Afghanistan had higher divorce rates than their peers who saw no action, but his source of information is not cited.
[160]Losoto 81.

for service was the mention of a 'field post office' address.[161] Moreover, women felt that they could not associate with male veterans, take advantage of veterans' clubs, or indeed make known their service during the war, from fear of being considered a prostitute.[162]

The perception, and consequent treatment, of veterans by the public seems to have passed through three stages. Until 1984, the veterans were ignored. During this first stage of silence, one veteran noted that thousands of people searched archives and battlefields for clues to the whereabouts of soldiers who went missing in action during World War Two, while no one bothered to maintain the graves of those who died in Afghanistan.[163] Even the gravestones themselves were the subject of controversy. The military authorities initially allowed only this inscription on a gravestone: '[Died] In the Course of Official Duty', and only after a struggle was the substitution of the word 'international' for 'official' approved.[164]

In the next stage, from 1985 until the end of the war, veterans were treated with disdain (except in the official press) as soldiers who had failed to achieve victory in a relatively small-scale war. As late as 1984, the Afghan Heroes of the Soviet Union were not invited to the Kremlin for the award ceremony, which suggested that they were considered to be second- rate when compared to their forebears who fought in the Great Patriotic War.[165] Paradoxically, objections were voiced within the military itself, such as the cynical observation by an Afghan officer that one man who was made a Hero of the Soviet Union survived a sudden enemy attack not through valour but because he happened to be in the latrine at the time.[166] Attributing this sort of sentiment to a soldier would have been unthinkable fifty, or even five, years earlier. Indeed, young Afghan War veterans wearing their medals in public were verbally

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[161] Dynin, Posle Afganistana 46.
[162] Aleksievich 39.
[163] Dynin, Posle Afganistana 71.
[164] Losoto 64.
[165] Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik (1991) 141.
[166] Borovik, Afgansitan 153.

assaulted by people who mistakenly thought that these young men were using World War Two medals as a fashion item or as a sign of social protest.[167] Those women who earned the medal 'For Meritorious Combat Service' were also ridiculed with the insult that medals in their cases actually were bestowed 'For Meritorious Sexual Service'.[168] Although vehicle repair was a dangerous job in Afghanistan, entailing convoy escort, repairmen received few medals and no higher decorations than 'For Valour'. One possible reason was the legacy of the Great Patriotic War, in which vehicle repair was a rear echelon function.[169] And in 1988, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet decided against awarding all Afghan veterans a campaign medal, deciding instead to bestow a less prestigious diploma and badge.[170]

In the final stage, after 1989, veterans were lionized as forgotten heroes.[171] The Afghan Veterans Museum, located in the Lyublinsky region of Moscow, is one such belated attempt to commemorate those who died. Also in Moscow is the chestnut tree-lined Promenade of Peace in Krasnaya Presnya Park. In the Ukraine, 158 streets or squares and 30 schools have been named after soldiers killed in Afghanistan. As a possible indicator of future political strength, 120 'afgantsy' became People's Deputies in the former Soviet Congress of Peoples' Deputies; their numbers included Aleksandr Rutskoi, who was the first independently elected Vice President of Russia.[172]

Two authors of publitsistika who wrote in the last years of the Gorbachev era advanced into an intermediate stylistic territory between reportage and novel. Artem Borovik kept journals during two trips to Afghanistan in 1987 and 1989 which were published in serialized form in Ogonek under the titles 'Vstretimsya u trekh zhuravlei'

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[167] Dynin, Posle Afganistana 101.
[168] Aleksievich 24.
[169] Tkachenko, Afganistan bolit 40.
[170] Dalziel, 'Badges But No Medals'.
[171] Aleksandr Nemeshaev, Assistant Editor of Pereval, personal interview, Moscow, 25 Sept. 1991.
[172] Dynin, Posle Afganistana 68-73. For number of deputies, see 105. For an account of Aleksandr Rutskoi's bravery as an airman shot down several times, captured once, and ultimately repatriated, see A. Gorokhov and V. Izgarshev, '... Samolet vzorvalsya', Pravda 18 Aug. 1988: 6.

('Let Us Meet at the Three Cranes') and 'Spryatannaya voina' ('The Hidden War'). Borovik was the first writer to describe this war in a journalistic style which suggested both physical danger and ideological threat. An avowed admirer of Michael Herr's personal account of the Vietnam War entitled Dispatches, Borovik drew inspiration from the American journalist's cynical outlook and fast-paced syntax.[173] And Borovik sought to render his impression of events and persons neither as examples of bravery, although he describes courageous acts, nor as pitiable objects of scorn, although his portrayal of a vanquished army in the 1989 series 'The Hidden War' is quite vivid. Rather, he projects through literary images the loss of control and unpredictability in warfare. The confusion of battle is conveyed in the 1987 'Three Cranes' through general statements ('In Afghanistan, safety depends not so much on the standard military logic, as it does on luck. Whether you want to or not, you become superstitious'); it is also conveyed through observations about his own perceptions ('My brain, scalded from heat and thirst, can't concentrate on anything, and flits from one thought to the next').[174] The fact that his own fragmented and incomplete vision is the medium through which his subject is presented serves by itself to break down a monolithic conception of war, and increases the sense of unpredictability.

This unpredictability becomes extremely pronounced in the 1989 series of articles 'The Hidden War'. One example is the real-life character of Lieutenant Colonel Ushakov (143-57). In any traditional propagandistic description of a Red Army officer, the reader knows after the first sentence what sort of stereotype, positive or negative, is being produced by the writer. Borovik presents the sympathetic Ushakov, however, like a character in a good novel who possesses surprising and seemingly contradictory qualities. The lieutenant-colonel has the mentality of a guerrilla warrior, suffers from bloodshot eyes and a chronic stammer, is a brave man and a cuckold,

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[173]Jerrold and Leona Schecter, Back in the USSR: An American Family Returns to Moscow (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989) 75-76. Imitation extended to deed: just as Herr kept an old French map of Indochina, Borovik preserved a hoary chart of Afghanistan dating from the 1950s given him by a British reporter.

[174]Borovik, Afganistan 26, 63.

hates all reporters and probably distrusts all Uzbeks too. Borovik treats his brief character study as a nucleus of particles ready to explode in unpredictable ways; his portrayal combines the observations of a keen-eyed reporter describing a living person, and the imagination of a writer of fiction who uses character to tell a story. That story, of course, is the disintegration of the Soviet army in Afghanistan, and the strong-willed yet confused Ushakov is the vehicle for delivering such a message.[175]

If Borovik uses his own personality as a filter through which the reader learns about the Afghan War, then Svetlana Aleksievich's 'Tsinkovye mal'chiki' ('Zink Boys') employs a myriad of personalities to study the conflict. Her work is a compilation of over forty first-person accounts from Soviet veterans or relatives of victims, notably including mothers of the slain, and women veterans, and civilians as well as soldiers. Additionally, these accounts are woven together by Aleksievich's own commentary, and her work has much higher ambitions than reportage. Where Borovik's goals are to deliver a vision of the war as an uncontrolled explosion within the Soviet Union, Aleksievich attempts to widen the context of the tragedy to the universal. All of the individual memoirs are personal, but Aleksievich frames these accounts in terms of the story of Genesis. She compares three days of field interviews to the first three days of Creation, as she goes about trying to reconstruct what she calls a 'history of feelings' of the war.[176] The author also engages in dramatic narrative dialectic with one character, an anonymous telephone caller who threatens her for desecrating the image of the Soviet army. In the end, the caller tells her that he is going

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[175]Borovik subsequently came under much criticism from the military for factual errors, and for trying to present as combat what was claimed by critics in the military press to be a carefully staged series of 'missions', in which the reporter was, perhaps unknowingly, carefully shielded from any actual fighting. See Aleksandr Fomenko, 'Predannaya armiya', Antivoennyi sindrom ili predannaya armiya? comp. A.I. Pozdnyakov (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1990) 72-73. A reply to Borovik's dispatches in the form of satirical fiction is Nikolai Ivanov's story 'S vyezdom na mesto', Podvig 38 (1991): 181-86, discussed in Chapter Five of this thesis.

[176]Aleksievich 8. It might be noted that the author's references to Genesis do not overwhelm her subject, unlike Gennady Bocharov's chapter introductions from Ecclesiastes in his book Russian Roulette, which by comparison seem pretentious.

to name his newborn son after a fallen comrade. Thus the stories recorded in her interviews are unified in a single dramatic plot of national rebirth and redemption.[177]

This chapter has surveyed the Soviet documentary and investigative journalism which was written on the Afghan War. The openness with which the Russians treated this painful subject, especially so soon after an unprecedented defeat for the Red Army in the post-World War Two era, has proven to be as surprising as the previous decade of official adherence to ideological orthodoxy was predictable. Negative themes in recent publitsistika on the war include the resentment of the soldiers toward the central government which sent them to fight, and the disillusionment of homecoming. The details of the conflict as revealed in this genre destroy the previous stereotypical image of a monolithic military operation found in officially sanctioned literature, to reveal instead a complex human enterprise which often went awry.

This genre has also come to incorporate highly subjective, interpretive writing. Even the earliest cited example of publicistic writing, Zvezdy podviga, contains pseudo-literary passages, such as an introductory description of sunrise prior to an account of heroism.[178] What is unique to the works of Borovik and Aleksievich, however, is the intrusion of individual, unpredictable personalities in the roles of both journalist and interview subjects. As the state's political authority in literary matters has withered away, the journalist has stepped in to replace it. Indeed, Artem Borovik, with his imaginative, impressionistic reworking of reportage -- to the extent of blurring the line separating non-fiction from fiction, and reporter from the event to be publicized -- harkens back, stylistically, to the equally captivating World War Two dispatches of Ilya

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[177] Aleksievich's War's Unwomanly Face is about the experiences of Soviet women in The Great Patriotic War. Her book attempts to publicize ordinary women's feelings (as opposed to those of men, or of heroes of either gender), much as her subsequent work attempts to publicize the feelings of the 'afgantsy', as opposed to the soldiers of the Great Patriotic War. War's Unwomanly Face is not nearly as frank, however, and occasionally the book resorts to propaganda, such as the statement by one woman that Russians neither raped nor pillaged during the conquest of Germany (235-36).

[178] A. Nekrylov, 'Sol' zemli', in Dynin, Zvezdy podviga 164. 'The steppe awakened. The sun, bursting over the horizon, illuminated the dry, wrinkled earth, and penetrated the shroud of clouds which the wind had blown from the east.'

Ehrenburg.[179] Borovik, however, documents in stylistic terms a lost faith in rationality, which necessarily rejects the Soviet ideological framework. And Aleksievich, with some of the most startling first-person accounts of the war framed in terms of religious rebirth, does the same. These two writers not only portended the fall of an outmoded system of beliefs, but also opened new literary avenues through which to explore the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. The genre of publitsistika as it applies to the fighting in Afghanistan has evolved rapidly in the era of glasnost.

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[179]Ilya Ehrenburg, Russia at War (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1943).

Chapter Four

Song and Poetry

This chapter is an overview of song and poetry about the Afghan War. A brief history of the genre of amateur song, an art form which emerged from the very beginning of the war, will first be provided. After Soviet criticism on 'Afghan' songs and poems has been reviewed, a discussion of the genre will focus on three historical types of song -- the 'mass song' and the 'amateur song' from World War Two, and the magnitizdat 'guitar poetry' which emerged in the 1960s -- which arguably have influenced the present generation of songwriters. The discussion of the texts which follows is a thematic review which treats both song and poetry together, since many works move between the two genres of song and poetry: the poems of Aleksandr Stovba were only set to music after his death, for example, and Viktor Kutsenko sometimes recites his songs as poetry on recordings. This general thematic review of representative songs and poems is then placed within the aforementioned context of historical precedents for this type of Soviet war literature. The chapter will conclude with a look at various professional poets, both Soviet and emigre, who have used the war as a topic, along with a closer examination of an 'afganets' poet, Aleksandr Karpenko, whose works transmute the politics and the violence of the war into a distinctively personal lyric expression.

It should be noted at the outset that the question of textual authenticity is always problematic with regard to 'amateur' songs, or folk songs, or poems which originally have no authoritative texts. Mindful of the four main stages of folklore transcription -- 'the text as performed on one occasion, the collector's field notes, the collector's subsequent final copy, and the published version'[1] -- and how songs or poems may change at each stage, this overview is primarily limited to the final stage of a select and

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[1]James O. Bailey, 'Folk versification', Handbook of Russian Literature, ed. Victor Terras, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985) 149. Bailey credits the enumeration of the four stages to E. Gippius.

small percentage of the total output of 'Afghan' songwriters and poets.[2] This problem is compounded in the case of 'Afghan' war songs and poems, which, it shall be shown, were originally suppressed by the political and military authorities. Indeed, the Russian transcript of a magnitizdat tape obtained by Robert Gillette, reporter for the Los Angeles Times, and published in Novoe Russkoe Slovo, reveals a possible example of censorship in the first official songbooks published in the Soviet Union.[3] A song entitled 'That Night Our Barracks Was Given the Signal' by Yury Kirsanov is found both in the 1983 Novoye Russkoe Slovo newspaper edition and in the 1990 Soviet publication Iz plameni Afganistana (From the Flames of Afghanistan).[4] The song describes the alert given to a unit of paratroopers on the eve of the December 1979 invasion. The last verse of the original magnitizdat version, missing from the later official publication, reads: 'And the impregnable fortress collapsed,/Where mighty power had held sway for centuries./And the throne of Amin scattered like ashes/Under the finely-honed Russian bayonets.'[5] This reference to Amin's death during the storming of the Darulaman Palace by Soviet special forces on 27 December 1989 apparently remained a politically sensitive topic at the time of the book's 1990 publication, which might account for the absence of these lyrics from the published text.[6] Petr Tkachenko also stated that his first publication of songs, Kogda poyut

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[2]Petr Tkachenko acknowledges the problem of editorial corrections to original versions of songs when he argues in favour of preserving non-standard grammar in transcriptions of texts. See Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 16-18.

[3]Vladimir Kozlovsky, 'Letyat v Kabul vcherashnie mal'chishki', Novoe Russkoe Slovo 9 Sept. 1983: 4.

[4]Yury Kirsanov, 'V tu noch' prishel signal v kazarmu k nam', Iz plameni Afganistana, ed. Petr Tkachenko (Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1990) 33-34

[5]The songs in Kozlovsky's magnitizdat transcriptions, however, are generally identical -- other than with respect to changes, such as the instance cited, which possibly are due to political censorship -- with later versions published in the Soviet Union. This does not include minor discrepancies, or words in question from Kozlovsky's transcripts. For one example, in the poem 'Vozvrashchenie domoi', note the questioned item in the line: 'My ved' s vami, struny, sluzhim zdes' v (desante?)' (See Kozlovsky, 9 Sept.) A check of the subsequent official Soviet publication shows that the actual word in question is the name of the city Shindand ('v Shindande'). For text as published in subsequent version, see Yury Kirsanov, 'Podnimalas' zor'ka', Tkachenko, Iz plameni Afganistana 36.

[6] In Vozvrashchenie iz Afganistana (142n.), Ninel' Streltsova observes in a footnote that as late as 15 May 1988, a joint Soviet-Afghan declaration repeated the claim that the original invasion had occurred at the express wish of the then-current legally constituted governnment of Afghanistan, which in December 1979 was led by Amin. Strel'tsova finds it necessary to add comments from Yury Gankovsky, a Soviet scholar who has studied the culture and politics of Afghanistan, which confirm

soldaty (When Soldiers Sing), was subject to censorship,[7] as did Aleksandr Karpenko when speaking of his first book of poetry, Razgovory so smert'yu (Conversations with Death), from which certain poems were deleted.[8] Thus the texts which are the subject of this discussion are understood to be in many cases only a first, official version. Indeed, this discussion is necessarily a circumscribed view of a subject which, if judged by the number of poems published in each edition of the various veterans' newspapers, is constantly growing in volume.

Soldiers' songs from the Afghan War, originally performed 'in the evenings ... gathered round our armoured vehicles',[9] probably appeared within the first several months of occupation, but accounts differ as to how quickly they spread throughout the army. Viktor Verstakov, military journalist and prominent 'Afghan' poet, stated his belief that the soldiers initially sang tunes which

> were generally well-known: songs from the [Great Patriotic] war years, hiking (turisticheskie) songs, even Soviet pop (estradu). Their own songs appeared a bit later -- at the end of 1980. Then they spread like lightning on hundreds of cassettes, and could be heard in all the garrisons, in tents, at headquarters. Soldiers listened to them, copied them, quoted them in letters home, sang them before battle and even during the fighting.[10]

This later date corresponds approximately with the recollection of Sergei Loktionov, a soldier who served in Afghanistan from February 1980 until May 1981. In an interview, Loktionov recalled that during his tour of duty there were still no 'Afghan' songs, although some men in his company wrote poetry. Instead, 'we sang Russian folk songs and popular hits'.[11] The date of his departure coincides with a possible date of composition of the popular song 'The Battle Raged Near Kabul' by Yury Kirsanov.

Soviet armed participation in the operation that killed Amin. She also cites the fact that among the Heroes of the Soviet Union decorated for combat service in Afghanistan are several KGB personnel who were awarded this medal for their actions in December 1979. Her book containing these observations, which she treats as revelatory, was also published in 1990, the same year that Iz plameni Afganistana appeared, emphasizing the sensitivity even at that late date of the Soviet government concerning these facts.

[7]Petr Tkachenko, personal interview.

[8]Aleksandr Karpenko, personal interview.

[9]'Songs by Unknown Soldiers', Soviet Analyst 13.7 (1984): 6.

[10]Viktor Verstakov, 'Vspomnim, tovarishch...', Pravda 27 Dec. 1988: 6.

[11][Tarasov] 203.

Vladimir Kozlovsky, writing in Novoe Russkoe Slovo, states that an unidentified voice on a magnitizdat tape gave the date of the song's composition as the summer of 1981.[12] This song was to become an unofficial hymn of the Afghan veterans, perhaps marking with its date of composition the start of widespread underground popularity for 'Afghan' songs. Thus it seems that while songs were composed and sung from the beginning of the war -- an informal army ensemble which played 'Afghan' songs, 'Kaskad', was formed in 1980,[13] and Yury Kirsanov composed songs from the beginning of his first tour of duty in Afghanistan[14] which began in August 1980[15] -- the military leadership perhaps was able to suppress their widespread dissemination for a year and a half.

After mid-1981, if not earlier, these songs were probably beginning to spread throughout Afghanistan, although they still seem to be an underground phenomenon, 'migrating from writing pad to writing pad, notebook to notebook'.[16] As music, the early melodies apparently are derivative; Lieutenant Colonel Valery Klimov relates that although some tunes were composed by individual soldiers, more often the soldiers borrowed contemporary popular melodies.[17] But lyrics in certain instances were clearly original. Especially popular, for example, was the poetry of Aleksandr Stovba, an ethnic Russian born and raised in Ukraine, who was killed in action on March 1980 at the age of 22. In 1982, his poetry, published posthumously, appeared in the first of a number of volumes.[18] Stovba's poems would subsequently be put to music by

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[12]Kozlovsky, 9 Sept.
[13]Dynin, Posle Afganistana 56. The name derives from, but has no other connection with, the designation given to Soviet special forces units such as the one of which Yury Kirsanov was a member, and which were assigned classified high-risk missions (see Verstakov, 'Vspomnim, tovarishch'). Vladimir Kozlovsky writes that there is an indecipherable dedication on his magnitizdat tape: 'Pesnya posvyashchaetsya vsem zhivym i pavshim boitsam otryadov ("Kostad?") i "Kobal't".' The former reference is probably to 'Kaskad'; I do not know what the reference to 'Kobal't', or an earlier mention of 'Karpata', designate. Perhaps they are similar units. See Kozlovsky, 9 Sept.
[14]Jacket notes, Vremya vybralo nas, Pt. 1.
[15]Verstakov, 'Vspomnim, tovarishch'.
[16]Dynin, Posle Afganistana 51.
[17]Dynin, Posle Afganistana 51.
[18]Volumes include Aleksandr Stovba, Pesnya grozy sil'nei (Dnepropetrovsk: Promin', 1982); Podviga polet bessmertnyi (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, n.d. [1983/4?]), and Zvezda rozhdaetsya v ogne (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, n.d. [1983/4?]); Za tebya -- v ataku! (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya,

Major Vasily Donskoi, a young Kiev composer and graduate of Frunze Higher Military Academy, and arranged by Viktor Zakharchenko, artistic director of the State Kuban Cossack Choir.[19]

By 1984, 'Afghan' songs were well established in the ranks; one veteran who served from 1983 to 1984 recalls that he and his compatriots sang 'Afghan' songs along with ballads from the popular 'bards' of that era: 'Vysotsky, Okudzhava, and Nikitin'.[20] Bestowing official recognition on this phenomenon, a 1984 Krasnaya zvezda article took as its subject a new generation of soldiers' songs.[21] Emphasizing that these songs were heard at Soviet military posts throughout Afghanistan, the reporter distinguished two different types of songs. The first category consisted of revisions of traditional Great Patriotic War hymns updated with contemporary references to Afghanistan: 'From the military drivers I heard the "Song of the Front-line Driver", but the lyrics were their own, an 'Afghan' version: "We took the column along the mountain cliffs to Aibak, Kunduz, and Faizabad ..."'. The second type, claimed the article, was comprised of original compositions born exclusively of conditions in Afganistan, although the reporter provides no example. He notes only that 'the soldiers copy the songs on tape from one another, and the authors are often unknown. Good songs!' The journalist, a lieutenant colonel of engineers, could not have been ignorant of the fact that border guards were under orders to seize all tapes of unofficial songs belonging to demobilized soldiers, which perhaps explains his reticence in quoting any sources directly.

Indeed, the Afghan War witnessed the first widespread use by Soviet combat soldiers of magnitizdat, the unofficial, self-recorded reproduction of songs on magnetic tape by private individuals. During the Great Patriotic War, professional poets and song-writers were mobilized to produce 'mass songs' designed to inspire the nation to

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1983), as cited in Ezhegodnik knigi SSSR, 1983, (13370), t. 1, ch. 2 (Moscow: Kniga, 1986); Mama, ya vernus' (Kiev: Radyans'ka shkola, 1987), as cited in Dmitrenko, AIST 11.
[19]Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 22; Dynin, Posle Afganistana 51.
[20][Tarasov] 194.
[21]V. Sukhodol'sky, 'Pesnya', Krasnaya zvezda 12 March 1984: 4.

victory.[22] For the first few years of the Afghan War, however, the Soviet government maintained that none of its forces were participating in offensive combat operations. Thus, it could not commission poets to compose 'mass songs' or poetry which could play the role of popular World War Two songs such as 'Katyusha' and 'Zemlyanka'.[23] In fact, the reverse occurred: the sung poetry of soldiers, recorded on tape as magnitizdat and brought home by demobilized veterans, had been liable to confiscation by border guards from the first years of the war. Viktor Verstakov said that 'ignorant officials at the border ... seized cassettes and notebooks containing copied texts; and the radio, television and print media pretended that such songs did not exist.'[24] But Verstakov reports that a nurse in Shindand showed soldiers how to wind magnetic tape backwards onto cassette spools in order to deceive the border guards.[25] Soon, 'almost from the first weeks of the Afghan events, songs which arose there were also spreading throughout the homeland.'[26] For example, Evgeny Evtushenko notes that his poem 'Afganskii muravei' ('The Afghan Ant'), written in 1983 and recited only to select audiences, migrated to Afghanistan, metamorphosed into song, and several years later returned via magnitizdat smuggled back into the Soviet Union.[27] And one of the first examples of magnitizdat that found its way to the West was publicized in 1983. Robert Gillette, reporter for the Los Angeles Times, wrote an article about an unofficial tape he obtained of songs sung by soldiers in Afghanistan.[28]

The first official publication of soldiers' songs was compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Petr Tkachenko, a Krasnaya zvezda correspondent who solicited tape recordings brought back from the war by veterans.[29] This compilation appeared in

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[22]Gerald Stanton Smith, Songs to Seven Strings (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 19-20.
[23]Alexei Barkhatov, '"What Kind of Men Shall We Be, Lads?"', Soviet Literature 8 (1989): 129.
[24]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik 243.
[25]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik 243, 249.
[26]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik 243.
[27]Evgeny Evtushenko, 'K portretu vremeni', Ogonek 1 (1989): 9.
[28]Reference to Gillette's Los Angeles Times article of 19 April 1983 is found in Kozlovsky, 'Letyat v Kabul vcherashnie mal'chishki', Novoe Russkoe Slovo 8 Sept. 83: 4.
[29]Tkachenko, personal interview.

1987 under the title Kogda poyut soldaty (When Soldiers Sing);[30] the book's popularity justified a second printing in the following year.[31] Tkachenko compiled a second collection of songs in 1988 under the title Vremya vybralo nas (Time Chose Us), taken from a popular Afghan War song written by Major-General Viktor Kutsenko, whose songs and illustrations were included in the book.[32] At the same time, publicity on the literary front was beginning to be afforded to these authentic voices from the war. V. Okulov, Pravda correspondent, attended an evening of music and poetry at a Soviet army canteen in Kabul.[33] The subjects of the songs covered a wide range of experiences: for example, Warrant Officer Irina Morozova, serving with a sapper unit, composed a song in honour of women's contributions on the front lines. 'We will leave, men,/Our fears in reserve./Let the Panjsher heights/Remember us./Conscience will not allow us/To stand to the side,/Although our hands have blisters/And armour is hard.' Surgeon Gennady Kostyuk's poem described the anguish that he witnessed in a military hospital: 'The nurse/Was sobbing./In twenty years/I had never seen such a thing./The sergeant--/He had danced with her the night before--/Was taken off a mountain today,/Barely alive.' Reporter Okulok listed such topics for poetry and song as: lyric evocations of the homeland; realistic descriptions of battles; longing for loved ones; and eulogies to fallen comrades. But he also mentioned more diverse literary approaches, including 'witty fables in verse' in the manner of Krylov by Warrant Officer Viktor Vityuk; and radioman Sergei Penzev's 'humorous letters home in verse recalling Aleksandr Tvardovsky's Vasily Terkin'. The genre of war songs had thus begun to expand into areas which had previously received little publicity, and was now recognized in the official press as a popular phenomenon.

In November 1987, a song festival with the theme 'Time Chose Us' took place in Ashkhabad in conjunction with the first All-Union Meeting of Young Veterans. The

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[30]Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty cited in Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik 244.
[31]Marinova.
[32]Tkachenko, Vremya vybralo nas.
[33]Okulov.

festival received the support of the Turkistan Military District's political bureau, and brought together for the first time relatively well-known names and previously unrecognized songwriters. Many songs which previously had been designated as anonymous or of communal creation were now attributed to their actual composers. The state recording firm Melodiya had produced in 1987 a recording of the 'Afghan' group 'Kaskad'; starting in 1988, the firm went on to issue four more records under the title Vremya vybralo nas (Time Chose Us), which contained selections from songs originally performed at the 1987 Ashkhabad festival.[34] By 1988, then, the military establishment had fully recognized this new generation of soldiers' songs which was being created by the junior troops. For example, Colonel Yury Belichenko uses several fragments of patriotic songs written by 'afgantsy' to introduce each section of his article covering the Afghan War.[35] His preface lauds the 'purity, strength and truth' found within soldiers' songs, which he personally found extremely moving, if aesthetically unpolished. In 1989, some of these lyrics were published together with poems on the war in Literaturnaya gazeta in belated official recognition of their literary value.[36] And by 1990, under the new economic order, veterans were taking control of their own record production. When the First Russian Festival of Afghan War Songs was held at Yaroslavl in November 1990 with the theme title 'Forward, Afganets!', a record was produced not by Melodiya, but under the auspices of the Yaroslavl Commercial Cooperative of Internationalist-Veterans.[37]

The aesthetic merits of Afghan songs and poetry are adversely criticized in the official press almost as often as they are mentioned. Critic Alexei Barkhatov notes in an aside that these are 'artless songs and poems' (129), while Petr Tkachenko assumes an apologetic tone in his description of poetry containing 'guileless, simple sounds' which are often 'naïve in tone'; he then states that the aesthetic level of these songs is 'rather

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[34] Jacket notes, Vremya vybralo nas, Pts. 1-3.

[35] Yury Belichenko, 'Ushchel'e', Krasnaya zvezda 8 Nov. 1988: 4.

[36] Petr Tkachenko, 'Pamyat' moya, kak nabat...', Literaturnaya gazeta 12 July 1989: 6.

[37] Afganskoe ekho. Festival' avtorskoi pesni, Yaroslavskoe oblastnoe khozrashchetnoe ob"edinenie voinov-internatsionalistov, Russian Disc, R60 00135, 1990.

uneven' due to the contributors' 'varied cultural levels'.[38] More forthrightly, critic Aleksandr Fomenko complains that

> too evident in them is the influence of modern mass culture: these days, it is difficult to preserve a vital spirit in the suffocating atmosphere of modern popular hits (estradnye shlyagery), and of the song cults of V. Vysotsky [the famous balladeer] and A. Rozenbaum [a contemporary singer-songwriter on the Afghan War], and of rock music, both domestic and western produced. Very rare songs may bear comparison with the best examples of Russian military poetry and soldiers' folklore.[39]

But Tkachenko also states that if 'Afghan' songs are of poor quality, this should be attributed to the general (and in his opinion generally deserved) discontent with popular mass songs. He believes that the quality of amateur songs is dependent on the development of professional song rather than the reverse.[40] His colleague Viktor Verstakov seems to be of the same opinion when he writes that

> Military 'Afghan' folklore could have become, and had already started to become a jargon-filled and almost underworld (blatnoi) [type of song]. Alas, not once during the years of the Afghan events did the musical professionals or professional literati compose a single popular song, or a single poem which achieved popularity among the soldiers; instead, they continued to ignore the amateur body of works created within the ranks of the army.[41]

All of these critics unanimously note, however, that despite the lack of professionalism, the emotion contained within these songs distinguishes them from the moribund state of popular mass song. 'The amateur song has flourished as a source of feeling', says Tkachenko, for example; and, commenting on one poem, Barkhatov observes with passion, 'These are words which came pouring from a heart brimful of suffering.'[42]

What are the generic traditions which have produced 'Afghan' songs? According to Russian commentators, there are at least three genres of Soviet song which have contributed to the songs composed by soldiers in Afghanistan.[43] The first

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[38]Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 6, 16-18.

[39]Aleksandr Fomenko, comp., '"Na surovoi zemle afganskoi, pod chuzhim nelaskovym nebom..."', Slovo 88 (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989) 282.

[40]Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 7.

[41]Verstakov, Afganskii dnevnik 244.

[42]Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 9; Barkhatov 128.

[43]Not discussed in this analysis is Petr Tkachenko's assessment of the role in 'Afghan' songs of ancient folklore. He briefly mentions three elements to be found: the hero's perception of his weapons as sentient creatures, harkening back to the anthropomorphization of work tools; a passionate love

and second types of song arise from the legacy of World War Two. The first is the official 'mass song', a form unique to the Soviet era, following the dictates of socialist realism, and composed by an author belonging to 'a corps of professional specialized lyricists and composers'.[44] The hero of these songs, in the words of G. S. Smith,

> fights all the way through to Berlin, and then returns, medalled, grey-haired in his twenties ... He is an example to his fellows and the object of admiration by the patient mother or fiancée who has waited patiently for his return and will now build a family with him. Or -- the preferred scenario -- he sacrifices his life at the front, and is still awaited by a mother or widow faithful to his memory and by the grieving but proud children.[45]

As for the general characteristics of the songs themselves, Smith concludes that 'if one phrase could express the essence of the interpretation of the war theme in the Soviet arts, it would be "justified sacrifice".'[46] One example of this genre in the present era is 'Remember, Natashka',[47] in which a young 'afganets' scribbles a note to his lover while sitting in his BTR. The lyrics contrast the soldier's memory of the loved one with his immediate surroundings; suggest doubt as to the lover's fidelity ('Remember, Natashka, I'm picking a daisy/You love me, you love me not'); confirm true love as found in the lover's letters; and conclude with a tribute to the solidarity of the soldier's comrades in arms.

The other type of World War Two song which plays a part in the formation of the 'Afghan' song is the 'amateur song'. Amateur songs (samodeyatel'naya pesnya) are written by non-professional poets or composers: 'Soldiers and officers, partisans

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relationship with one's native land, equal to or personified by a lover; and the apotheosis of the feminine image, so that woman becomes the figure of a guardian angel. See Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 20. Other commentators note similarities between 'Afghan' songs and, for example, 'rebel songs of Stepan Razin; Cossack songs composed during the War of 1812; genres of the heroic Russian ballad, and the officers' love song; the poems of Denis Davydov (see Barkhatov 129-30). Aleksandr Prokhanov, the journalist and writer, also sees resemblances to Cossack songs, 'only instead of a horse, a BTR, and instead of sabre and spear -- an AK rifle.' (See Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 11). Writer Yury Teplov sees similarities with more contemporary sources, namely folk songs which arose 'under difficult conditions', such as the Baikal-Amur Mainline railroad construction in the Far East (see Yury Teplov, 'Granatovyi tsvet', Vtoroi variant (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1988) 350. But these sources are not necessarily roots.

[44]Smith, Songs 26.

[45]Smith, Songs 19.

[46]Smith, Songs 20.

[47]Stanislav Volkov, 'Pomnish', Natashka', Afganskie zvezdy, ed. A. V. Kalinkina (Moscow: Patriot, 1991) 74-75.

and rear-echelon workers ... often not known beyond their regiment or company, or partisan unit, even though their songs became popular.'[48] In the case of two recent songbooks on the Afghan War, the tables of contents are divided into 'amateur songs', whose authors are not known; and 'authors' songs' (avtorskaya pesnya) where attribution is made;[49] but in both cases the composer is almost necessarily a non-professional. Additionally, amateur songs are associated with contemporary informal, amateur performances in cafes and clubs, and are also composed and performed by members of military units.[50]

The legacy of these amateur songs from the Great Patriotic War is partly direct, in the form of older songs modified to fit the circumstances with Afghan geographical designations or names.[51] Precedents for such modifications may be seen in soldiers' songs of the First World War adapted to fit the Civil War, and then recast back to their original lyrics for World War Two when the Germans once again were the enemies.[52] In similar manner, Yury Kirsanov's 'Afganskaya' is based on the World War Two song 'Baksanskaya'. The original, written in 1943 about an expedition to remove the German flag from Mount Elbrus (and based on a pre-war tango by B. Terent'ev called 'Pust' ne prikhodyat') contains the refrain 'Remember, comrade, the white snows' ('Pomnish', tovarishch, belye snega').[53] Kirsanov preserves in his 'Afghan' variant a similar rhythm and refrain ('Let's Remember, Comrade, Afghanistan') ('Vspomnim, tovarishch, my Afganistan').[54] But 'Afghan' songs will also be shown to fit

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[48]C. I. Mints, O. N. Grechina, B. M. Dobrovol'sky, 'Massovoe pesennoe tvorchestvo', Russkii fol'klor velikoi otechestvennoi voiny, ed. V. E. Gusev (Leningrad: Nauka, 1964) 103. This orthodox Soviet analysis labels 'amateur song' as a specific type of 'mass' song. But this is apparently only done as a means of ideological legitimation.

[49]Tkachenko, Vremya vybralo nas and Kogda poyut soldaty . Instead of 'authors' songs', the latter book substitutes the heading 'Songs based on the verses of army poets' for the section devoted to attributed songs. On a related note, Vladimir Vysotsky described his own compositions as 'author's songs', contrasting them with 'stage' or vaudeville' song (estradnye). See Smith, Songs 238, 18n. Tkachenko also distinguishes 'authors' songs' sung by an individual, and 'ensemble songs' sung by a group. See Petr Tkachenko, foreword, 'Avtomat i gitara', Podvig 34 (1989): 99.

[50]Smith, Songs 43.

[51]Mints 107.

[52]A. M. Astakhova and N. V. Novikov, 'Russkii traditsionnyi fol'klor v gody V. O. V.', Gusev 45.

[53]E. Mikhailov, 'Rozhdalis' pesni na voine', Krasnaya zvezda 3 Nov. 1984: 3.

[54]Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 12-13.

surprisingly well into thematic categories devised by Soviet scholars to describe the amateur songs of the Great Patriotic War, which will be outlined below, thus allowing a comparison to reveal areas of continuity as well as change.

The third type of song from which the 'Afghan' song draws its formal characteristics represents a branch of contemporary folk music which has still to be clearly defined. Soviet scholarship has provided a simple, though admittedly insufficient, definition of folk song as 'anything not canonized in textual form'. This term also includes any modified song which was originally written by a non-professional but changed in subsequent performances, as new narrative facts and geographical place names are substituted by the individual singer according to personal experience or audience. If a song written by a professional is changed in subsequent performances, that new song is known as a 'folk variant'.[55] There is also a defintion provided by western scholarship which includes four criteria: collective composition; anonymity; oral transmission; and variability of texts.[56] Each of these definitions describes certain facets of 'Afghan' songs at certain stages of their evolution, yet none is sufficient independently to describe the genre. This insufficiency seems to be sensed by various commentators when they describe 'Afghan' songs, leading them to use the term 'folklore' but only with additional qualifications -- which, however, ultimately seem to lead in the same direction. A case in point is critic Alexei Barkhatov's introduction to a selection of 'Afghan' songs and poems in Soviet Literature in which he uses various terms touching upon folklore. He places 'Afghan' songs in the context of a particular modern 'variety of folklore' originally created by both rural and urban dwellers who were dissatisfied with 'the professional pop art industry'.

> Thus it was that rural dwellers, dissatisfied with [popular music], composed new chastushkas (humorous quatrains) to the strains of old accordions, while physicists and actors, geologists and mountain-climbers performed their own songs to the strumming of guitars. This was a variety of folklore, which revived not the forms but the essence and purpose of folklore, which attracted and united the people within their professional

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[55]Mints 105-07.
[56]Smith, Songs 46.

and other interests and, the main thing, elevated them from the ranks of passive audience.[57]

In his opinion, 'Afghan' poetry is the next variant of this modern offshoot of traditional folklore.

This classification of 'Afghan' songs is similar to Vladimir Kozlovsky's 1983 evaluation of 'Afghan' magnitizdat performances, wherein he likens the recordings to the well-known guitar bards of the 1960s. 'We had before us not Vasily Terkin with his little accordion from the previous long war, but specimens of the heroic-guitar genre (according to the expression used in the old Yunost' [journal]) of the 1960s.' Kozlovsky highlights the example of the 'Afghan' song 'Only an Hour Has Been Given Us Until Departure', which he says is based on a song by Vladimir Vysotsky about the penal (shtrafnye) battalions from World War Two.[58] Thus, we may progress logically from Barkhatov's description of his 'modern folk variant' to G. S. Smith's definition of the more modern phenomenon of guitar poetry, which is 'poetry sung by the author to his own guitar accompaniment', and 'connected irrevocably with the composer's own voice and performance'.[59] Indeed, Smith calls Vysotsky a practitioner of a certain type of modern urban folklore,[60] which would correspond to Barkhatov's characterization of 'Afghan' songs. Even Petr Tkachenko's orthodox division of contemporary songs into three categories acknowledges the debt of 'Afghan' songs to the magnitizdat guitar poetry of the 1960s. Tkachenko distinguishes between professional songs; traditional folk songs of past eras; and modern amateur songs. Although he labels both professional and folk art as types of 'mass art' in orthodox Soviet fashion, he believes that the modern amateur song, under which rubric he places 'Afghan' songs, lies at the juncture between them.[61] This independent

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[57] Barkhatov 128.
[58] Kozlovsky, 8 Sept. Unattributed text of the 'Afghan' song which is purportedly based on Vysotsky's song may be found under 'Vsego lish' chas do vyleta nam dan', in Tkachenko, Plameni iz Afganistana 147. Incidentally, the title of Kozlovsky's two-part serialized article, 'Letyat v Kabul vcherashnie mal'chishki', comes from this song.
[59] Smith, Songs 220, 229.
[60] Smith, Songs 58. To be precise, he classifies Vysotsky as a practitioner of the 'underground song', which is part of 'modern urban folklore'.
[61] Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 6-7.

position seems to correspond to the relatively modern magnitizdat guitar poetry which, like 'Afghan' songs, was suppressed by the authorities, and from which the soldiers took their cue when creating for the first time their own brand of subversive texts.

Concerning their performance, almost all 'Afghan' songs were originally composed for solo voice accompanied by guitar, or accordion,[62] instruments traditionally chosen for ease in play, portability, and durability.[63] For some songs, a small chorus may join the refrains, or a piece may be performed in concert by a group.[64] In addition, Afghan War magnitizdat also occasionally incorporates taped background soundtracks. One example is a song called 'A Helicopter Pilot Perished in the Mountains Near Ghazni' by Vladimir Shabunin.[65] Some taped copies purportedly are overdubbed with the last actual radio transmissions between Captain Sin'ko, to whom the song is dedicated, piloting his crippled aircraft in its final moments of flight, and the ground controller, in which can be heard the captain's order to his fellow crewmember to bail out.[66] Another example is the sound of gunfire, and that of a muedzin's call to prayer, which may be heard in the background to several of Yury Kirsanov's songs (automatic fire is heard in 'A Battle Raged Near Kabul',[67] and the muedzin may be heard on the song 'On the Party's Order'[68]). Kirsanov refuted rumours that the gunfire was the soldiers' own, taped while firing into the air, and that they had paid a mullah to intone a call to prayer. He claimed that the gunfire was recorded during a battle, and that 'the prayers were taped at the entrance to a mosque'.[69] Petr Tkachenko additionally notes the incorporation of various sounds

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[62]Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 22.
[63]Smith, Songs 44.
[64]Kozlovsky, 8 Sept. For specific examples, see 'Ya ubit pod Kandagarom', with chorus sung by the musical ensemble 'Ekho Afgana'; 'Vyvod' sung by the trio 'Poslednii shans', both on the double album Afganskoe ekho.
[65]Vladimir Shabunin, 'Pogib vertoletchik v gorakh pod Gazni', Tkachenko, Iz plameni Afganistgana 87-88.
[66]Tkachenko, Dorogie moi 166.
[67]Yury Kirsanov, 'Boi gremel v okrestnostyakh Kabula', Vremya vybralo nas, Pt. I. Text may be found under the title 'Afganskaya', Tkachenko, Iz plameni Afganistana 32-33.
[68]According to Kozlovsky, 8 Sept.
[69]Verstakov, 'Vspomnim, tovarishch...'. The title of the article comes from the refrain in 'Boi gremel'.

such as helicopter rotor blades, and even the Kremlin chimes.[70] It must be noted, however, that these dubbed soundtracks, authentic in source but not integral to an actual live and unrehearsed performance, must be treated as the artist's conscious use of these sounds as part of the songs' text. This is in contrast to 'the creak of furniture, the chink of bottle against glass, the coughs and muttered comments from the audience in the room' of early magnitizdat as it was recorded in the 1960s.[71]

As an overview of songs about the war, several works might be cited at the outset as examples of melodies whose authors have enjoyed the most popularity in the first years after the war. According to Viktor Verstakov, Yury Kirsanov's songs are the most popular. Kirsanov first arrived in Afghanistan in August 1980 at the age of 29, and served in a tank regiment. He later served as a member of an elite special forces unit (designated 'Kaskad'). During both tours of duty he played his guitar, and organized musical performance groups. One group under his direction reached the semi-finals of a military competition, but at that point the judge thought that their songs -- some of which were written by Kirsanov -- 'were too sad, and inspired depression'. Nevertheless, Kirsanov's song 'A Battle Raged Near Kabul' became the unofficial hymn of the Afghan veterans.[72] The song, based on the World War Two song 'Baskanskaya' as noted above, was first presented in printed form as 'Afganskaya' in Time Chose Us, without attribution, and it exists in a number of variations.[73] The lyrics are not expressly patriotic, but they convey pride, as well as seeming resentment over perceived political ineptitude on the part of the Soviet leadership. 'We aren't

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[70]Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 22. The Kremlin chimes may be heard at the beginning of Kirsanov's song 'V dekabre zimy nachalo', Vremya vybralo nas, Pt. 1.
[71]Smith, Songs 98.
[72]Verstakov, 'Vspomnim, tovarishch...'. On the Melodiya recording Vremya vybralo nas, Pt. 1, the title is listed as 'Boi gremel v okrestnostyakh Kabula'.
[73]Tkachenko, Vremya vybralo nas 17. One variation is 'Boi gremel v okrestnostyakh Khinzhana'. (Tkachenko, Kogda poyut sodaty 49). Another is 'Nad Kabulom snova solntse svetit', which is more lyrical and less bellicose (Tkachenko, Vremya vybralo nas 69-70). Unlike Kirsanov's version cited above in the text, there is no mention of 'bandits' (dushmany), and instead of a plane landing in Kabul with ammunition, a plane lands in Russia with returning soldiers. See also the attribution of one of 'many versions' to Valeri Rozin in Barkhatov 131.

diplomats by calling,/Dearer to us is our little brother-automatic rifle'. It also borders on Great Russian or Soviet chauvinism: 'You know, Muslim lads, your strength is that we are on your side.' And it is sentimental, as reflected in the refrain: 'Let's remember, lads, Afghanistan,/The glow of the campfire, the prayer calls of the Muslims,/ the clatter of automatic fire,/explosions beyond the river [a euphemism for Afghanistan],/Let's remember, comrade, Let's remember, friend.'

Another song which became a theme for Afghan veterans is Viktor Kutsenko's 'Time Chose Us'.[74] On one recording, he chooses to recite the words as a solemn incantation, rather than sing them to the melody he wrote. 'Time chose us,/Whirled us into the Afghan storm,/Our friends called us in a critical hour,/We put on a special uniform./And in the fire of the difficult mountain roads/We sprinkled campaigns with our blood,/Never noticed any panic in the whirlwind,/As minutes turn into years.'[75] The song promises that 'many glorious Russian names' have been chiselled in 'the granite of eternity' due to valour exhibited in Afghanistan. Kutsenko was a major-general in the engineers who served in Afghanistan from 1984 to 1987. He is a sort of Rennaissance figure; he writes lyrics and melodies, performs his own songs on the guitar, and provided the illustrative sketches for the songbook Time Chose Us. His is a conservative, patriotic voice; he criticizes stories, for example, which depict Afghan veterans in a negative light.[76]

Finally, one of the most popular songs is remarkable for not having been written by a veteran. Aleksandr Rozenbaum, an established singer-songwriter, did not serve in Afghanistan; nevertheless, his composition 'The Black Tulip' was popular with the forces in Afghanistan.[77] He performed his work for the Moscow observance of the first 'Memorial Day for Internationalist-Soldiers' on 15 May 1989.[78] The ballad

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[74]Viktor Kutsenko, 'Vremya vybralo nas', in Tkachenko, Vremya vybralo nas 143.
[75]Kutsenko, 'Vremya vybralo nas', on Vremya vybralo nas, Pt. 4.
[76]Strel'tsova 18-19. Specifically, he criticizes 'On byl moi samyi lychshii drug' by Oleg Khandus, a story which is discussed in the next chapter.
[77]O. Smirnov, author and comp., Nikto ne sozdan dlya voiny (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1990) 5.
[78]A. Oliinik, 'Zabveniyu ne podlezhit', Krasnaya zvezda 16 May 1989: 4.

takes its title from the nickname given to the aeroplanes which transported war casualties in coffins back to the Soviet Union. The song opens, 'In Afghanistan, in a "Black Tulip"./With vodka in a glass, we silently fly over the earth./The sorrowful bird, across the border/Toward Russian summer lightning, carries the lads home.' The plane receives its cargo from Shindand, Kandahar, and Bagram, avoiding 'Stinger' missiles, and takes its heroes on their final 'never-ending leave'. One refrain intones, 'Caravans are coming from Pakistan,/And that means there will be work for the "Tulip".'[79] Perhaps because of official sensitivity to this topic, Rozenbaum's songs have yet to be included in collections of Afghan War songs published by Voenizdat.

The following general overview of 'Afghan' songs begins with those compositions which correspond to the official 'mass song' of the World War Two era. Just as certain examples of publitsistika have been shown to express conformist opinions about the Afghan War, so too has the genre of song been used to express the feelings and viewpoints of those veterans -- by no means a minority -- who are conservative-minded. An example of this type of song is found in the lyrics of Stanislav Volkov (set to music by Mikhail Mishunov), contained in the booklet of songs called Afganskie zvezdy (Afghan Stars).[80] The foreword is written by Aleksandr Rutskoi, air force colonel, Hero of the Soviet Union, and first elected Vice-President of Russia. His conservative introductory message opens with references to various historic invasions of Russia, and he quotes a defensive reply by Colonel-General Gromov countering claims by critics that the Soviet army was an occupying force in Afghanistan. Thus, these songs seem to have been assigned a role not so much to express the positive feelings of soldiers and the virtue of patriotism, as to defend the army's legacy in Afghanistan against liberal political criticism.

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[79] Aleksandr Rozenbaum, 'Pesnya o "Chernom tyul'pane"', Komsomol'skaya pravda 10 Feb. 1989: 1.
[80] A.V. Kalinka, ed., Afganskie zvezdy. Subsequent references under the abbreviation (AZ) are included in the text.

Volkov's lyrics conform to those values and forms which are exemplified in official Soviet socialist realism. In 'Crane Song' (AZ 14), the verses are remarkable for their density of standard images: 'Over the long river/The crane's song/Beckons with gentle sadness to my homeland./Somewhere there, beyond the Volga/The dewfall awaits us,/The white birch trees over the water.' 'The Garrison Beyond the Clouds' (AZ 22) describes duty at a remote Afghan mountain outpost. It consciously employs poetic language ('vershiny krutaya tverd'') ('the steep world of a mountain height'), describes the ultimate purpose of the outpost ('A defence against the bandit's mine,/Peace-giver to villages in the valley,/And a shield for children [as protection] against death'). Lastly, Volkov's 'Thank you, Shuravi [Soviets]!' (AZ 93) is a conventional tribute paid to the Soviets by the Afghan people, marked only by the fact that it is penned by a Russian. The solidarity of the internationalists and their Afghan allies is painted in propagandistic tones: 'We went into battle, like fellow countrymen, shoulder to shoulder./He was always next to us, our Afghan brother.' In a subsequent stanza is the line, 'A mother, not his own, whispered in the starlight: "Thank you, son. Thank you, Shuravi!"' To underscore this ideological orthodoxy, a final reference is made to the April sun flooding the countryside, which implicitly refers to the 1978 April revolution. When searching for historical precedents, Volkov chooses conventional images from the Great Patriotic War. 'Obelisks at the Pass' (AZ 47), for example, describes the memorial markers erected by Soviet soldiers to their fallen comrades.[81] The song compares the markers to Great Patriotic War memorials near Smolensk and Moscow, linking the sacrifice of the 'afgantsy' to that of their forefathers and thereby bestowing ideological legitimacy on the former.[82] Likewise, these official songs as a group remain nationalist rather than internationalist, Russian rather than Soviet. Volkov's 'Pathway to Home' (AZ 108) is a paean to the Russian motherland,

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[81] Stanislav Volkov, 'Obeliski na perevale', Kalinkina 47.

[82] Aleksandr Pozdnyakov is one of the only poets to stray outside this orthodox boundary of historical references, although his ideological message remains conformist. His song 'For the Last Time The Machine-Gun Has Fired' (Tkachenko, Iz plameni Afganistana 281) proclaims that there is no Afghan mujahed comparable to Shamil or Hadji-Murat, the nineteenth-century Moslem resistance leaders in the Caucasus.

featuring a sentimental list of rural sights and sounds: dew on the apple trees, hayricks, buzzing honey bees. The last line of this song concludes with the nationally specific 'Rossiya'.[83] Thus, Volkov's songs seem to be a contemporary manifestation of official 'mass songs' from World War Two found in Red Army songbooks of the 1940s and 1950s.[84] They are extremely patriotic, nationalistic, and lack historical specificity, as do most official 'mass songs'.[85]

Also in this category belong poems written by eminent official Soviet poets, who wrote poems which correspond to the orthodox interpretation of the war as a battleground for heroes, and a direct legacy of the Great Patriotic War. In her poem "'Afgantsy'", Yuliya Drunina, World War Two veteran and eminent poet, compared young Afghan War veterans to the veterans of her own generation, and enthused over a new group of soldiers fighting in Herat instead of Desna.[86] Likewise, Fazu Alieva, the Dagestani national poet (narodnaya poetessa),[87] penned a conventional tribute to a war hero's courage with her poem 'The Face of Valour' (IPA 247).

Most 'Afghan' songs, however, including those published in books officially approved by the military, seem to fall into categories which Soviets have used to describe the amateur songs of World War Two, or of the contemporary era. The continuity and evolution from World War Two to the present might be charted by showing how 'Afghan' songs either correspond to or fall outside of categories for these songs, which will be outlined below. In fact, there seems to be remarkable thematic

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[83] The one exception found to this general Russian nationalist trend is 'Over the Distant Mountains' (Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 100) in which the singer recalls his native Kazakhstan. To counterbalance nationalist pride, however, Soviet power is explicitly reinforced in the last stanza with the line 'Glory to Frunze and Panfilov'. During the Basmachi Rebellion of the 1920s, General Mikhail Frunze was commander of the Turkestan Red Army, and General Ivan Panfilov served as military commissar for Kirghizia.

[84] See, for example, S. Bulatov, ed., Krasnoarmeiskii pesennik (Moscow: MUZGIZ, 1946); or Bulatov, ed., Pesennik dlya voinov sovetskoi armii (Moscow: MUZGIZ, 1947); V.A. Kazakov, ed., Stroevye pesni sovetskoi armii i voenno-morskogo flota (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1954).

[85] Smith, Songs 17. In relative ideological terms, these songs are identical with a popular American hit of the 1960s called 'The Ballad of the Green Berets', which was written and performed by Vietnam veteran Barry Sadler. That song extolled the courage of the US Special Forces, and served as a political buttress supporting American military involvement in Vietnam.

[86] Yuliya Drunina, "'Afgantsy'", Yunost' 8 (1987): 12.

[87] Dynin, Posle Afganistana 104.

continuity between official versions of Afghan War songs and their Great Patriotic War counterparts. But we shall see also how some songs, which even the military authorities print, set precedents, if not in form, then certainly in content. These songs conform more closely to the categories outlined by G. S. Smith in his work on the guitar poets who performed their works in the 1960s.

In their study of Russian folklore from the World War Two era, the Soviet scholars Mints, Grechina, and Dobrovol'sky classify songs in one of four categories based on purpose and thematic content.[88] The four categories are: inspirational marches or hymns; lyrical epics; purely lyrical songs; and satire. The first group of songs are agitational and propagandistic. Their purpose is to 'galvanize the collective', often through a story of heroism. The song may open by stating a theme, or naming a particular unit; then follow with a 'poetic declaration of the fighting ability of the collective hero [in other words, the bravery of the masses, as opposed to that of an individual; or, the mass as narrative hero] which is purposefully hyperbolic'. The body of the song tells the story of a particular mission or campaign, and praises the commander, who is also named, except, for security reasons, in marches written and sung by partisan units. If the commander was killed in action, his death is used to inspire hatred of the enemy, and as inspiration for victory. The typical song concludes with an oath to continue the fighting until victory. Refrains are brief, sometimes single admonishments or slogans, and often employ metres different from that of the stanzas. These songs may incorporate tragic themes, such as the destruction of the homeland. They often use the metaphor of natural or meteorological disaster for German atrocities: mass slaughter of civilians, for example, may be likened to whirlwinds (vikhr', groza). But this is countered by similar images symbolizing the collective will to resist, such as 'the people's hurricane', or 'the partisans' snowstorm' (117). As the authors sum up, this type of song is agitational, heroic, and concrete.[89]

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[88]Mints 104.
[89]Mints 106-19.

Many 'Afghan' songs fit into this category of inspirational marches and hymns. 'We Leave at Sunset' is an agitational, high-spirited march which is sung by the collective 'we', except for the second of four stanzas which switches to the first-person singular.[90] The unit is going to participate in a Panjsher Valley campaign (Over the Panjsher blows the wind,/Puffing our pennants until they reach the sky.') Lest the image of 'the wind' be an uncomfortable reminder of resistance leader Ahmad Shah Masud, the next line insists, 'Only dust stands over us'. The stanza finishes with a standard reference to a soldier's 'dear AKMS' automatic rifle. The remaining stanzas are also heroic: the narrator admits that 'They say, I'm a fine brave lad', and that he may one day be a general, and that he feels magically protected from bullets. The unit commander is clever, although he is new, and the unit obeys him with barely the need for commands; the song ends with a warning to the enemy. This unattributed song is a prototypical agitational hymn, and might fulfil the same role, placed second in this early book of Afghan soldiers' songs, as hymns to Stalin were placed immediately following the Soviet national anthem in post-World War Two songbooks for the Red Army.[91]

Folkloric elements, as cited by Mints, are present in many of these contemporary songs. Aleksei Blokhin's 'Smile, Peasants' is a good example of a propagandistic, agitational song which expresses an optimistic, orthodox political message while describing a particular mission.[92] 'Well, come out, it's us, and not the bandits', opens this song to the Afghan peasant. One individual character exemplifies both the idyllic familial aspect of the Soviet army, and the fairy-tale ferocity exhibited toward enemies. 'Let us introduce our warrant officer, our dear WO,/Hasn't shaved in three days, and has dust in his eyes./To us he is like our own dear papa,/To the bandits he is like an impending thunderstorm [or 'terror'] (groza).'[93] The song concludes with

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[90]Tkachenko, Vremya vybralo nas 21. Subsequent references to this book under the abbreviation (VVN) will be included in the text.
[91]See, for example, Krasnoarmeiskii pesennik or Pesennik dlya voinov sovetskoi armii .
[92]Aleksei Blokhin, 'Ulybnites', dekhkane', Tkachenko, Iz plameni Afganistana 128. Subsequent references to this book under the abbreviation (IPA) are included in the text.
[93]This image of natural weather phenomena occurs frequently in 'Afghan' songs; another example is Sergei Bolotnikov's song 'Our Battalion is Leaving on a Mission' (IPA 193) which portrays a

a formulaic reference to the girlfriends and mothers who await the soldiers in the homeland with warm bread on the table, and the unambiguous political message that 'We know clearly that Afghanistan's honour/Is in our rough and tired hands.'

This type of formulaic song, however, occasionally expresses an unexpected sentiment. 'The Salang Pass' (AZ 6), for example, is a conventional march of three stanzas, each concluding with repetitive phrases ('We are defending, we are defending,/We are defending our [Salang] Pass.') (6). The song describes the dangers ('Hatred and vengeance still wander [the Pass]'); the soldiers' affection for the Pass ('You also, Salang, are a soldier') and the purpose of defending it ('so that peace forever more shall reign'). It adds, however, a note of protest which is absent from World War Two songs. The repeated line 'Someone needs this merciless fighting' recalls the bitterness felt by Afghan War veterans toward apathy on the home front, expressed by the phrase that the soldiers were 'fighting a war no one needs'.[94] Even this most orthodox of patriotic marches seems to have been affected by the political circumstances, and freedom of expression, new to the Afghan War era.

Also in this category of inspirational works are various songs sung by or dedicated to a particular job-related collective -- lorry drivers, for instance. An example is 'Afghan Road Song' ('Afganskaya dorozhnaya') based on the World War Two song 'Dorozhka frontovaya' by B. Mokrousov (VVN 33).[95] The song describes, if not a campaign, then a regular route from Kunduz to Faizabad. Despite its dangers, the drivers 'are not afraid of ambushes, though it's still too early to die.' Verstakov's 'Fly, Helicopter Pilot' (VVN 116) is an inspirational paean, ending with the slogan 'Happy landing, fellows!', which describes the courage needed to land a crippled helicopter and pick up a wounded soldier. Another socialist realist tribute is paid to the political agitprop units in Vladimir Urusov's 'Agit-Detachment' (IPA 274) which 'bring sacks

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hyperbolic hero, a 'jolly lad departing for the mountains/To grind the rebels to powder', and likens the landing of the Russian helicopter to 'a hurricane'.

[94]Compare to comments found in Smirnov 12. 'A million soldiers returned [home] to those who not only had no need for the war, but who turned out to be psychologically unprepared even to comprehend what had happened.'

[95]Similarity of intonation with 'Dorozhka frontovaya' is noted. See Smirnov 30.

of grain and wheat,/And also Russian folk-dances' to the 'simple village people'. 'Cover me, Wingman' (IPA 65) presumably is a song for helicopter pilots. The narrative convention employs a flight leader as protagonist describing a mission, all the while conversing with his wingman on the radio, using the refrain 'I attack, you cover me'. This song has several distinctive features: it names a specific weapon (the 'Stinger' ground-to-air man-portable missile used by the mujahedin); and it also incorporates narrative elements. The last stanza, which describes the leader going to the rescue of ground troops ('Wingman! Sasha! What's the matter? I'm setting down! Please give me cover!') there is the suggestion that the wingman has been hit by enemy fire. The author also attempts to lend authenticity to the language by incorporating actual phrases from radio transmissions ('How do you copy? I'm going in') ('Kak ponyal? Ya poshel') as well as having the pilot switch from official designation ('vedomyi') to his wingman's name ('Sasha') in order to convey the urgency, the danger, and the comradeship of actual battle.

Two songs about soldiers' duties which border on lyricism are 'The Tanks Rolled Today Without Stop' (VVN 29). This song makes use of the lyrical 'whirlwind' (vikhr') image for the war, and the last stanza recalls the girls who await the soldiers. Yet it voices a certain dissidence in the second stanza: 'There is no time to learn here, and few joys,/In this undeclared war'.[96] Likewise, a negative image emerges in the refrain of another unattributed composition called 'Song of the Helicopter Pilots' (VVN 46-47), with such lines as 'And no one wants to think about the war.../But tomorrow the war starts again.'

The next category of amateur song from World War Two is similar to the romantic ballad, and is comprised of lyrical epics about individual heroes and their exploits. They praise actual people who are famous either nationally or locally; or they

[96]The expression 'undeclared war' (neob"yavlennaya voina), it should be noted, is an expression used in the official press from the beginning of the war as an attack on what the Soviet government called western imperialist intervention, that is, the use of Afghan mujahedin in a proxy, 'undeclared war' against the Soviet Union. This expression is in contrast to Artem Borovik's use of the term 'hidden war' (spryatannaya voina) in the late 1980s, which constitutes a radical political criticism of Soviet intervention.

may portray an anonymous hero who meets a tragic death. The song often includes the hero's dramatized monologue addressed to his wife, family, or comrades. The refrain may express the narrator's sympathy, as well as that of the audience who may sing the chorus, and also portray how nature joins in mourning.[97]

The lyrical epic songs have relatively few representatives in these official collections. One example is Viktor Kutsenko's 'Song Composed By a Soldier' (VVN 148) about an anonymous hero who is killed by a sniper's bullet as he sits composing a song. According to the author, his song is based on an actual event, in which the soldier had supposedly composed all but the last line of his 'rough-hewn' song.[98] Kutsenko supplies another song 'Over the Soldier Leaned the Nurse' (VVN 154) about a man who wakes up in hospital after having lost his arms in battle, yet who asks his nurse not to cry for him. In a reversal of roles, he promises her red roses for her suffering, and reminds her that tears will not bring back his lost limbs. Another example is Vladimir Kaushansky's 'Keep My Guitar Safe' (VNN 166), which describe the eponymous last words of a soldier named Alesha who is killed by a sniper. 'Zampolit' (VVN 187) by Leonid Molchanov is a conventional tribute to Hero of the Soviet Union Aleksandr Demakov, who was killed in action. It is sung by the spirit of the dead political officer, but instead of being used to inspire confidence in battle, the song employs conventional images of birch trees bending and brooks gently babbling to identify the hero with the homeland. It uses the traditional World War Two theme of memory as the equivalent of resurrection: 'I will forever remain young/And I will live through the simple word "memory".' In 'Interview' (IPA 131-32) by Vladimir Silkin, a soldier who has lost his legs requests of a military journalist not to portray him as a hero: 'I know: one thinks about duty,/But at the time, in the pass,/I was thinking, that I'd come home without legs,/That I'd be lucky to reach home.' A variation on this theme is Pavel Kalina's ballad 'The Girl in White' (IPA 283). The narrator visits the grave of a paratrooper, which occasions the memory of a battle during which a girl,

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[97]Mints 120-23.
[98]Tkachenko, Iz plameni Afganistana 21.

'white as a ghost', floats above the gorge. 'Angel of war or peace? Or perhaps a bride-to-be?' asks the balladeer. Both sides cease fire, but when the paratrooper runs to protect her, he is killed. The song is notable because it lauds a specific Soviet military leader. 'There was only one good thing [about the battle], that over the sea of fire,/No flocks of "Phantoms" [fighter aircraft flown by the enemy Pakistani air force] soared --/'But then how could they appear -- forgive me for even suggesting --/In a region commanded by [40th Army Commander Boris] Gromov?!' These songs employ the traditional device of the dying or injured hero's monologue, although the heroism they exhibit is not used as exhortation to victory, but as simple evocation of grief and coming to terms with death. Perhaps this relative dearth is a reflection of the patina of shame associated with the war, and a manifestation of the soldiers' bitterness over being sent to fight a war about which the authorities considered it necessary to be silent.

The third category is the lyric song, which in the case of World War Two songs, dwells on the themes of love, friendship, and duty, the veneration of the homeland and appreciation of nature. This genre includes thematic groupings such as the so-called 'girls in greatcoats', in which women are portrayed as standing next to the masculine lyrical hero in battle, without, however, usurping his central role. Another group of songs falls under the rubric of 'song-letters', in which the lyric sentiment is contained in a 'letter' sent from the front to a loved one at home. This expression of love is often used as a contrast to, or inspiration for, hatred directed at the enemy. Love is also used as a contrast to the fear which is felt before battle, as in the oft-quoted example of the famous song 'Zemlyanka', which takes the form of a letter to a lover on the home front.[99]

There are many purely lyric songs to emerge in official publications of Afghan War songs. Perhaps one of the most vivid is Viktor Verstakov's 'A Star Shines Over Kabul' (KPS 132), which seems to derive from Lermontov's poem 'The Dream' ('In

[99]Mints 126-35.

the noonday heat in a valley of Dagestan'). The narrator is a soldier who has fallen in battle and now lays dying in the snow, staring up at a star over a minaret. He laments that his motherland will never sigh over him, and that he will be forgotten; and, as in the Lermontov poem, the verb 'smoke' is used to evoke the spilling of warm blood.[100] Other songs in this category also refrain from looking upon the war in Afghanistan as an opportunity for campaigns or victory. In the following cases, they see its value only as a rite of passage. The unattributed 'Only an Hour Until Flight Departure' (KPS 38) intones, 'They told us: we're flying to Kabul,/To Kabul are flying yesterday's boys.' Another such lyrical homage is 'Medical Nurses' (KPS 103), which repeats the theme of newfound maturity gained in war, rather than victory: 'Yesterday's little girls save yesterday's little boys.' Several lyric songs are pointedly non-patriotic, personal expressions of fear and tensions. 'Again I'm Going On a Mission' (KPS 44) tells of a soldier's simple motivation: 'Medals don't attract me,/I'm just afraid of becoming a coward'. 'And Once Again We Set Out' (KPS 56) depicts the oppressive atmosphere of anxiety ('Fortune and death/Are always beside us'), in an environment without recognizable features ('an alien horizon, an alien land') in which the soldier feels cut off from every friendly contact, as represented by the anodyne sentiment of a letter written home.

A separate sub-category of lyrical songs is devoted, usually affectionately, to geographic locations and cities. 'In Shindand' (KPS 67) cites the danger of this area, and suggests rivalry and pride: 'This isn't Kabul for you,/Not the east or the south/ ... And sometimes until morning,/The voice of war may be heard.' 'Faizabad' (KPS 78) describes that city, 'reddened from dust and sun', and concludes sentimentally, 'You were paradise and hell,/But for this we loved you.' Viktor Verstakov's ode 'Jalalabad' evokes eucalyptus and palm trees, only to end with a mention of the danger of snipers. Other affectionate songs are composed in honour of Chakvardak (KPS 51) and Kunduz

[100]A verse omitted from the first printing (Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 132) but included in a subsequent edition (Tkachenko, Iz plameni Afganistana 56-57) seems to suggest that the song was inspired by the initial storming of the Darulaman Palace, where Amin was killed ('Without documents, without names or nations,/We lay about the burned palace').

(IPA 157-58), the latter a town which is so isolated that 'Allah doesn't see you from on high./Capricious Fortune forgot about you too'; but despite being a city 'Forgotten by God,/You will never be forgotten by us.'

Kirsanov's 'Letter to a Lover' (VVN 89) is representative of the 'song-letter'. In this case, a soldier refuses to tell his beloved the details of the fighting, which are then included in the song. The soldier concludes with a folkloric comparison of the beloved to a guardian angel. Igor' Morozov's lament to an absent lover, 'This World Without You' (VVN 98), is a similar evocation of the difficult life of the soldier in an alien environment. And Aleksandr Stovba, with his 'Hello, Mum!' (later set to music by Vasily Donskoi) (VVN 176) is a simple greeting from a young soldier to his mother telling her that he soon will be home. Boris Kolpakov repeats this convention in 'The Unsent Letter' (IPA 116-17), which, however, contains a strong anti-war sentiment. The letter, which will not be sent, expresses 'How sick I am, finally,/Of eating sand and lead,/And looking at the world through the gunsight of an automatic.' A song-letter refreshing for its frank sentiment and specificity is 'Today is Exactly a Year' (IPA 164), in which a soldier writes to his brother about his service in Asadabad in the [northeastern border] province of Kunar, fighting a 'Basmach' leader named Mavli Khusein, who it turns out, has lost his 'most able-bodied bastards' in battle with the Soviets.

Love songs are also represented, such as the simple 'Letter' (KPS 55) which describes a letter from home, and a lament about how far away the lover is. 'Photograph' (KPS 65) repeats the simile of the guardian angel, finding purpose as well in the idea of sacrifice for the loved one. The single example of love shared by an Afghan woman and a Soviet soldier is 'How It Is With Us in Chakvardak', a romantic ballad in the form of a dialogue between the two narrative voices.[101] A 'Kaskad' special forces unit arrives from Kabul, and one of the Soviet soldiers catches the eye of an Afghan woman. 'When I caught sight of the <u>shuravi</u>, nightingales sang in my

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[101]Fomenko 283-84.

heart./I forgot all shame, and the shariat too.' Despite her invitation to join in her repast, the soldier replies in the next verse that his commander has ordered his men to sleep in their armoured personnel carriers. She admonishes him to seize the moment, since the bandits lay in wait in the mountains with their sharpened yatagans (swords). The song ends as the soldier vows to dispatch the bandits to paradise, at which time he will return to partake of the proffered feast. This song, incidentally, is an example of how this genre of modern folklore tends to undergo rapid changes.[102] In one published version (IPA 170), this romantic ballad changes to a ribald song (after the feast, she promises to divest herself 'of more than just the parandzha', or full-length veil; and proclaims her indifference to the fact that he is an 'uncircumcised infidel').[103]

The final category of World War Two songs is that of satire. These songs were aimed at the enemy, and at traitors, including all 'enemies of Soviet socialist morals'. They did not appear until after Soviet forces achieved their first tactical victories in the latter part of 1941. These ditties arose from popular comedy songs, often incorporating a waltz rhythm. They satirized Hitler and his generals, but also often took the form of letters from German soldiers to their kin, contrasting initial expectations of victory with the reality of the fighting.[104] This last category has its nearest equivalent in 'joke songs' (shutochnaya pesnya) written by the 'afgantsy'. Instead of being directed at the enemy, as was the case in World War Two, the modern joke songs are aimed at the Soviets themselves. To cite two examples, the unattributed 'If You Happen To ...' (KPS 80) uses simple formulaic humour: if you happen to be bitten by a cobra, look on the bright side; you'll probably never have to suffer another bite in your life. Each verse repeats an identical format. And Viktor Verstakov's satirical attack on media coverage of the war is contained in the poem 'Song About the Soviet Press' (IPA 71-72). The Soviet troops, it is recalled sardonically, are depicted in the press as 'giving

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[102]A characteristic cited by Tkachenko, Kogda poyut soldaty 14.
[103]The variation could also be due to censorship of the earlier (1989) version printed in Slovo 88.
[104]Mints 139-41.

concerts in the villages,/And during intermission/Holding children in their arms/And fixing up the tractors.'

Besides the aforementioned categories of song, the 'Afghan' genre includes songs which seem to have no corresponding category in the official World War Two canon. These songs seem to be more easily placed, at least in terms of how they were originally treated by the authorities, in G. S. Smith's category of 'underground' song. According to Smith, these magnitizdat songs of the 1960s, performed by singers such as Vladimir Vysotsky and Aleksandr Galich, received no media coverage, nor any public hearing. Smith notes the difference in underground magnitizdat treatment of World War Two, which was 'stark and disenchanted', as opposed to the optimistic treatment of the war in official song.[105] He also notes a subgroup of the underground song: the 'underworld' (blatnoi) song, which at one time, it will be remembered, Viktor Verstakov feared would engulf the entire 'Afghan' song genre. Indeed, such are the fears of an orthodox publishing establishment, that Petr Tkachenko unhappily admitted that published versions of 'Afghan' songs have been sanitized of substandard language.[106] An example of demotic language which probably would have been unpublishable in official songbooks may be heard in M. Smurov's song 'Soldier-Internationalist'.[107]

This is the genre of what might be termed the Afghan 'protest song'. Understandably, few representatives of this genre have been published by Voenizdat, yet there are remarkable examples nonetheless, many of them written by Party members.[108] Igor' Koshel's 'I'm Weary of Wandering' (VVN 136-38) is a bitter complaint voiced by a veteran who returns home to 'empty streets, feigned confessions, disappearing like smoke'. Against the public attitude to be grateful for having survived, his refrain sounds, 'Do you really think I could have returned,/If

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[105] Smith, Songs 105.

[106] Tkachenko, personal interview.

[107] M. Smurov, 'Voin-internatsionalist', Afganskoe ekho.

[108] For example, Major-General Viktor Kutsenko, and Valery Kovalev, cited below, were both Party members. See Smirnov 4.

someone else had not fallen.' A song with a similar motif, yet not expressing as radical an attack on society, is Igor' Morozov's 'I Once Knew Two Brothers' (IPA, 49) a fable concerning a young man who fulfils his duty in Afghanistan, and his rich, materialistic brother who escapes the fighting. A poem which focuses on the plight of invalids is 'A Night in Hospital' (IPA 272-73) by Nikolai Shiryaev. The author argues that disabled veterans, who are 'discarded by calculating fiancées', should not likewise be 'discarded by you, the Motherland'. Finally, Vladimir Parygin's 'Their Deathless Exploit' (IPA 250), which expresses resentment over condescension or disrespect shown to veterans, seems to threaten the use of violence against those 'who would look askance at our exploits --/We, with our soldiers' honour, will ne-ver yield!'

There are also several songs which contain direct expressions of anti-war sentiment. The refrain to the unattributed 'Again Alert' (KPS 96-7) repeats, 'Here they shoot,/Here, just as before,/The war goes on.' The last refrain, sung after the soldiers' return to the Soviet Union, underscores the seemingly endless nature of the fighting: 'Here they don't shoot,/But there, just as before,/The war goes on.' Another example is Yury Pakhomov's 'On the Road Tested by Death' (IPA 134-35), in which the soul of a dead Soviet soldier and poet, the narrator's friend, wanders along grey gorges after a battle, with the smell of powder still in the air, so recent that 'the jackals have not yet devoured the dead'. The narrator personifies war and addresses it: 'What have you done, you scoundrel, with our boys/I'd break both your arms if I could.' Even Major-General Viktor Kutsenko wrote a poem in which are found the lines: 'They move to the attack silently, gritting their teeth./There's no cry, 'For the Motherland, forward!/Parched lips only curse/A machine-gun raking point-blank fire from the mountain.'[109] Valery Kovalev's 'We Are Leaving For Home' (IPA 139-40) states questions that 'pain the heart: who was at fault?/... And so was this incomprehensible war necessary?' He protests that the veteran 'returns, incomprehensible to those/Who wearied themselves in feasting and drinking', but nevertheless vows that he and his

[109]Viktor Kutsenko, 'Idut v ataku molcha', in 'Pamyat' moya, kak nabat', Petr Tkachenko, comp., Literaturnaya gazeta 12 July 1989: 6.

comrades will not 'throw their medals at the Kremlin walls'. And in a song which borrows themes from the 'village prose' school, Mikhail Mikhailov has written a powerful lament by a demobilized veteran who returns to a dilapidated rural Russia. In 'At the Road Building Site in Non-chernozem Lands' (IPA 142-43), the veteran despairs over the prospect of 'schools which have long since ceased teaching,/Former church and club,/The forge, now cold, shut down,/The post office felled for wood./In the sepulchral quiet/A graveyard of old houses and dreams.' The refrain is an unbroken lament: 'Greetings, Russia, unwashed!/Greetings, my homeland!/Discarded and forgotten/By me, and others like me...'[110] Finally, Pavel Bonev, an Afghan veteran, has published a small booklet of verses whose 'essence is a protest against war, violence and deception in all of their manifestations.'[111] His poem 'Monologue of a Dead Man' recalls Lermontov's poem 'The Dream', in which a soldier dreams that he is lying dead in a valley in Dagestan. In Bonev's poem, however, the hero actually perishes.

I fell/in the blood-soaked snow,/My chest having taken in/The white-hot lead/I am prone/But my back is not chilled/And snowflakes do not melt on me,/My unseeing eyes/Look at the sky,/On my cheek/An icy white tear,/I am deaf, dumb,/Darkness and decay are before me,/The world of the living/I walled off./I spoke my solemn "no"/To this useless/And dirty war,/And my end/Is not the end/For other hearts/Which have not yet burnt up![112]

Although these songs are not the 'understated, wry, ironic' songs of a Bulat Okudzhava, they do assume the 'unheroic' aspects of his compositions.[113] This quality, combined with the impression of being sung by a social 'outsider', which marks much of Vladimir Vysotsky's guitar poetry, marks this particular strand of 'Afghan' songs as having roots in the tradition of underground guitar poetry which arose in the 1960s.[114]

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[110] At the bottom of the page on which the song is printed, is a small illustration of the chapel at Vladimir. The illustration perhaps is a manifestation of the recent volte-face performed by the military establishment toward the Orthodox Church.

[111] Pavel Bonev, Iz afganskoi tetradi (Leningrad: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1990) 3.

[112] Bonev, 'Monolog pogibshego', Iz afganskoi tetradi 13-14.

[113] Smith, Songs 126.

[114] One singer-songwriter, Valery Petryaev, with his theatrically guttural intonation, sounds especially as if he is imitating Vysotsky. See for example 'Vtoroi batal'on', Vremya vybralo nas, Pt. 1.

In addition, poetry has been used as a weapon in the political controversy surrounding the war. For example, Evgeny Evtushenko formulated a sharp critique of the intervention in his poem 'The Afghan Ant', a fable in which an Islamic ant crawls across the face of a dead Soviet soldier.[115] The ant asks rhetorically, 'What will you give to our destitute people -- a queue for sausages?' And in an unorthodox reference to World War Two, another question is posed: 'Have you suffered too few casualties, that you must add still more to twenty million?' Leonid Molchanov, a decorated veteran and poet, immediately counter-attacked for the conservatives with his bitter poem 'A Reply to Evgeny Evtushenko's Poem "The Afghan Ant"'.[116] Molchanov compares the soldiers who fought in Afghanistan to the Soviets who gave their lives in the Spanish Civil War, the Great Patriotic War, and who supported the Communist revolutions in Cuba and Vietnam. Another similar salvo was launched following a television film, co-adapted by Aleksandr Prokhanov, about Afghan veterans who combat the 'local mafia' controlling the construction of a gas pipeline in Siberia.[117] The liberal poet Aleksandr Yudakin criticized the movie in his poem 'I Saw a Film, Where Seven "Afgantsy"'.[118] He attacks the notion that 'a concussed soldier with a middle school education has the right to teach the nation how to live', and deplores the cult of the 'school of Afghanistan', as portrayed in the film, which supposedly has imbued veterans with moral superiority.

Other professional poets have also expressed views which would have been considered dissident in the early 1980s. Pavel Bulushev prefaces his attack on the war, a poem called 'Afghan Requiem', with a quote from a Vladimir Vysotsky song: 'We didn't have time to glance back/and our sons are leaving to fight.'[119] Bulushev does not criticize the foot soldier who fought, but rather focuses his ire upon Brezhnev, it

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[115]Evtushenko, 'K portretu vremeni'. As noted previously, Evtushenko made no friends in the conservative camp when he portrayed an Afghan veteran as the cold-blooded murderer of an innocent girl in his poem 'Koldunchik'.
[116]Leonid Molchanov, 'Otvet Evgeniyu Evtushenko na stikhotvorenie "Afganskii muravei"', Zhitnukhin 17.
[117]O. Nikich, 'Afganskaya tema: fil'm pervyi', Izvestia 27 January 1989: 7.
[118]Aleksandr Yudakin, 'Ya videl fil'm, gde semero "afgantsev"', Aprel' 2 (1990): 117.
[119]Pavel Bulushev, 'Afganskii rekviem', Zvezda 7 (1989): 3.

seems, the man 'with the false marshal's star, who was consumed with arrogance on his high throne.' Boris Dubrovin's 'Four Soldiers and a Lieutenant' tells the story of five men who are killed in battle, but listed as wounded in order to preserve the unit's record of victories without casualties.[120] The bodies are taken to hospital; only then are they allowed 'to die of wounds'. Lev Losev, the emigre poet, wrote 'Valérik' as a satire based on Lermontov's poem of the same name. In Lermontov's case, the poem is a forlorn, romantic letter to the soldier-narrator's former lover describing a battle in the Caucasus near the eponymous Valerik, which means 'River of Death' in the Chechen language.[121] In Losev's case, again a letter is sent by a soldier, but only to his brother who is nicknamed, like the letter-writer himself, Valérik.[122] The text is prefaced by a line from Pushkin's 'Fairy-tale of the Dead Princess and the Seven Knights' ('Or cut a head from the broad shoulders of a Tatar')[123] which places the poem in the context of a child's story with happy, invincible heroes casually decapitating infidels along the southern border of Russia. Writing about the Afghan War in a colloquial and demotic style which destroys all pretence of romanticism, Losev's soldier-narrator describes Kabul, then mentions the unit's transfer to Herat. At this point during the column's movement west, the narrative turns casually and unexpectedly violent. 'From some Berdan rifle, from some sort of shit/a wog (chechmek) hit Edik in the throat -- and he'd had it.' The narrator also explains how he himself has been captured and flayed alive by the enemy.

Lastly, Joseph Brodsky, Nobel Laureate, wrote 'Lines on the Winter Campaign, 1980' in response to the initial invasion.[124] His sombre lyricism, prefaced by a line from Lermontov's poem 'The Dream' ('In the noonday heat, in a valley of

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[120]Boris Dubrovin, "Afganistan. 1988', Yunost' 7 (1989): 66-67.
[121]John Baddeley, The Russian Conquest of the Caucasus (London: Longmans, Green, 1908) 350.
[122]Lev Losev, 'Valérik', Znamya 11 (1991): 73. Published earlier in Lev Losev, Chudesnyi desant (Tenafly, NJ: Ermitazh, 1985) 18.
[123]Aleksandr Pushkin, 'Skazka o mertvoi tsarevne i o semi bogatyryakh', Pushkin, Stikhotvoreniya 1826-1836, Skazki, ed. M. A. Tsyavlovsky (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk SSSR, 1948) 547, vol. 3, pt. 1 of Pushkin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii, gen. ed. V.D. Bonch-Bruevich.
[124]Iosef Brodsky, 'Stikhi o zimnei kampanii 1980-go goda', Uraniya (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1987) 97-99.

Dagestan'),[125] again, like Losev's poem, gains power by means of a seeming contrast with the earlier work, which romantically describes a tragic love story. Brodsky chooses instead to portray the war without resorting to integral human characters or faces. Soldiers are evidenced only by call signs spoken in the ether, or the stink of unwashed rags, or references to detached parts of the human physiognomy such as mouths, 'the torso's musculature', or vertebrae. Brodsky depicts the war not in terms of a romantic individual spirit, but as an historical catastrophe brought on by Russia's foreign and foul presence in Asia, which causes the moon 'to hide in the clouds, as if in the turban of Allah.' Brodsky's text predicts 'an ice-age of slavery' slowly creeping from north to south, engulfing Afghanistan, and perhaps, by implication, other 'meridians' as well.

One veteran of the Afghan War has written poems which exist independently from song or guitar poetry, although certain of his works have been set to music. Aleksandr Karpenko was born in 1961 in the Ukrainian city of Cherkassy. After schooling near Kiev, he left at the age of eighteen without a university degree to voluntarily join the army as a junior lieutenant. 'I was raised in the military-patriotic tradition, and felt sorry that I had been born too late for the age of heroism during the Great Patriotic War. And the media said nothing about what was going on in Afghanistan. Besides, I wanted to know: who am I? Am I courageous? So I volunteered for duty, and was happy for the opportunity to serve there.' In 1981, after one year of linguistic training in Farsi, he was posted to Kabul as a military interpreter. Barely two months after arrival, he was severely injured when the armoured personnel carrier in which he was riding struck a mine. After several years of convalescence for facial burns and injuries to his legs, he was able to pursue a writer's vocation by entering the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow. He studied there from

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[125] M. Yu. Lermontov, 'Son' ('V poldnevnyi zhar v doline Dagestana'), Stikhotvoreniya 1832-1841, ed. N. F. Bel'chikov (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo akademii nauk, 1954) 197, vol. 2 of Sochineniya v shesti tomakh, gen. eds. N.F. Bel'chikov, B.P. Gorodevsky, and B.V. Tomashevsky.

1984 until 1989, and continues to live in Moscow. Currently he claims to be one of the few Afghan poets who is able to earn his livelihood from the sales of his poetry.[126] He has published two small volumes of poetry, Razgovory so smert'yu (Conversations with Death) and Tret'ya storona medali (The Third Side of the Medal)[127], and his poems have also appeared individually in numerous periodicals and newspapers. He toured the United States in 1990, giving poetry readings; more recently, he delivered a eulogy at the funeral for the victims of the August coup attempt against President Gorbachev, two of whom reportedly were Afghan veterans. For his service in Afghanistan Karpenko was awarded the Order of the Red Star.

Unlike the generally direct and unmistakable delineation of themes in most 'Afghan' poetry, Karpenko incorporates ambiguity into his texts. He asks several riddles in the introduction of The Third Side of the Medal, which he calls 'a novel in verse with three main protagonists: God, the Devil, and Man. An especially astute reader may guess, however, that this is all a game of the imagination, and that in fact there are not three heroes, but only two' (TSM 2). Moreover, his poem 'The Third Side of the Medal' (TSM 15) expresses the author's view of the essential, hidden, multi-faceted aspect of the human spirit, a theme which occurs throughout his works. He seems to construct a universe of dualities: God and the Devil, Good and Evil, Life and Death, Truth and Illusion. In the process of combining them he destroys the bipolar universe which they seem to represent, and revealed instead is the multi-polar universe where all viewpoints are equally privileged, and equally justified. In another publication, he said, 'There is no struggle between truth and untruth! There is only struggle between truths!'[128] Indeed, his conceptual frame of reference is not Christian; it is self-admittedly private, as he believes is also the case with all readers.[129] This unknown, hidden aspect of reality is represented by the 'third side' of a war medal in

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[126]Karpenko, personal interview.
[127]Karpenko, Razgovory so smert'yu referred to in subsequent page citations as (RSS); Tret'ya storona medali (Moscow: Profizdat, 1991), referred to as (TSM).
[128]Smirnov 204.
[129]Karpenko, personal interview.

the poem, and represents a contrast to the unambiguous, simple, and didactic presentation of much officially published 'Afghan' poetry written by veterans.

Karpenko claims that the lyrical songs of Vladimir Vysotsky are the main formative influence on his poetry.[130] One of his earlier poems may be used as an example of his work. In 'Speak With Me, Grass' (RSS 5), a short lyric poem, the speaker compares himself and his war injuries to the grass which has been scorched in the summer sun.

Pogovori so mnoi, trava!
Skazhi mne, gde berutsya
sily?
Menya ved' tozhe tak kosili,
Chto otletala golova.
Skazhi, podruzhka, kak dela?
Kakie snyatsya
serdtsu dali?
Menya ved' tozhe podzhigali,
I ya, kak ty, sgorel
dotla.
Otkuda
sily-to vzyalis'?
Kazalos', net nas -- tol'ko
pepel,
No my iz etikh smertnykh
petel',
Kak ptitsa Feniks,
podnyalis'.
Skazhi mne nezhnye slova.
Nas zhdut i prazdniki,
i budni.
Ya snova molod, vesel, buen.
Pogovori so mnoi, trava!

The poet seeks faith in the rejuvenation of nature, and finds sustenance in the unquestioning instinct of self-preservation found in all living things: 'Speak gentle words to me./Holidays await us,/and workdays too./Once again I am young, happy, wild.' Karpenko calls the grass a metaphor for veterans who have returned to their native country to begin their lives anew after great suffering.[131] The grass in this case, however, seems to symbolize an entity which encompasses, yet extends beyond, both

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[130]Aleksandr Karpenko, poetry recital and interview, Studs Terkel radio program, Chicago, 1 April 1990.
[131]Karpenko, recital and interview.

the suffering veterans, and the poet's native land, to that of the entire earth. It should also be noted parenthetically that Karpenko employs a less common form of iambic tetrameter (for Russian verse) by bracketing feminine rhymes within masculine rhymes (aBBa) instead of the reverse (AbbA); additionally, his rhyme scheme allows for the combinations sily/kosili; pepel/petel' and, more radically, budni/buen. This relatively polished form is distinguished from the comparitively unambitious rhyme schemes of much Afghan poetry and song.[132]

Karpenko has transmuted his war injuries into lyric expression which is removed from a specific temporal context. In 'Conversations with Death' (TSM 8) the poet describes his near loss of life in Afghanistan. He personifies Death as a woman, borrowed from Blok's conception of the mysteriously tempting yet threatening Unknown Woman (Neznakomka).

In the cold of a Kabul autumn,/In the wordless, scorched desert/I climbed like a thin snake/Toward the blackened height in the distance./And, disturbing the ringing silence/And striking with a soft drumbeat/Suddenly I drew even with an unknown woman,/Slipping slowly toward the foothill.

Young and old,/A star of the silent screen,/Like a heroine of heroines,/she beckoned and terrified./All in black, velvet-black-currant,/A heel on a thin lining/And over her cheek a pale birthmark./A cigarette-holder and white gloves.

And blue, deep eyes/Beckoned me to a snowy embrace,/And emaciated faces steamed in the design of her dress./I staggered back, could not stand the gaze./An icy ray burned my heart:/Amidst the portraits -- gloomy, faded --/I recognized two brothers.

I was wounded in that early morning,/But the meeting was not a game:/She was searching for an equal in me,/She called me to go with her./But I remained. I was tired beyond all measure./The voice of an automatic rang out,/And a hat with feathers of mourning/Fell on the wreath of sunset.

In 'Donor' (RSS 36), he places the abstract creation of poetry in the concrete context of a hospital: he gains blood, and gives it back to others as poetry. Karpenko does not hesitate to use details from the clinical world of capillary tubes and blood type while discussing the greater sphere of the poet's vocation, which is 'seeking after truth in Rus''. And the reader is reminded with allusions to the pain of the injured narrator,

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[132]For example, compare Stanislav Volkov's 'A Soldier Writes' (AZ 32): 'Pis'ma kak ptitsy letyat,/Strochki skupee svintsa./Pishet, chto pomnit soldat/Shepot ryabin u kryl'tsa.', etc.

and matter-of-fact references to spilling of blood in battle, that this trade-off has not occurred due to unspecified illness, but because of war. Yet his use of the word 'enemy' refers not to an armed adversary, but to the medical condition stealing life from the poet. Although his wounds spring from war, the narrator has lifted himself heroically above the conflict. Finally, in the poem 'In Tashkent A Comrade Lost his Leg' (RSS 11) he compares the sensation of feeling a 'ghost' limb which has been amputated to the sensation of one's intangible essence. Moreover, the poem implies that the pain of a lost limb is precisely what is necessary to remind us that we indeed possess souls. 'But the pain of loss suddenly will strike from without ... /That is how we sometimes sense the spirit.'

Karpenko's use of symbols relating to his nation is generally optimistic and inspirational, yet occasionally he expresses despair over his country, as in 'I Dreamed that The Shutters Will Open' (RSS 29). 'Oh Russia, you, my Russia, how empty are your mirages!' The veteran feels love for his country, but suffers grief after coming home to an uncomprehending population. This grief is portrayed as a mask which hides human expression and identity. 'And a philosophical mask lay/On my once-living/Face.' This image may refer to a mask of scar tissue covering his 'once-living' face; at the same time, it is a mask of indifference covering his despair over the inhuman, unfeeling faces he encounters upon his return.

Another rare protest poem is 'Fast Tempo Danse Macabre' (TSM 21). This poem is perhaps inspired by Blok's 'Danse Macabre' cycle of verses; as one critic describes the latter series of poems, '[Blok] is evoking the forces of decomposition working within his society, and his face is stiff with horror.'[133] Likewise, Karpenko uses his 'Danse Macabre' to register despair over the spiritual legacy of Brezhnev's decision to send troops into Afghanistan. Karpenko uses irregular metre and rhyme scheme; moreover, he eliminates all punctuation and capital letters, so that the poem becomes a seamless outpouring of anger.

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[133] Avril Pyman, ed., Aleksandr Blok: Selected Poems (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1972) 238, 61n.

nepochtitel'nost' strany
snedavshaya nashi izranennye dushi
umalchivaniem
granichashchim s zabveniem
kazalos' mne besovskim gumleniem
nad sebe podobnymi
nesushchimi tyazhest' t'my
vprochem ogon'
predpologaet vodu i mednye truby
o etot slavnyi russkii obychai
kanonizirovat' muchenikov posmertno
v vozdukhe pokachnulas' ten'
nevidimogo sponsora
i tut menya osenilo
chto nekto zamyslivshii sei krovavyi farse
verkhovenstvuet i ponyne
dni zatmeniya
prodolzhalis' belymi stikhami nochei
v kotorykh taktika vyzhivaniya
kolebalas' mezhdu krikom i molchaniem
mezhdu otchayan'em i krikom

[the scorn of the country/eating away at our wounded souls/in silence/hemmed in by forgetfulness/seemed to me like devilish taunts/over those like me/carrying the burden of darkness/however the test of fire/suggests ice as well/O this glorious Russian custom/of canonizing martyrs posthumously/in the air a shade flitted/of an invisible sponsor/and here it dawned on me/that whoever thought up this bloody farce/is still ruling today/days of eclipse/continued with white verses of nights/in which the tactic of survival/wavered between a scream and silence/between despair and a scream]

The poet decries public indifference, although he seems to recognize it as inevitable ('however the test of fire/suggests ice as well'). He fulminates against what he perceives to be the Russian necessity to recognize heroes only if, and then only after, their lives have been sacrificed. The conclusion is a condemnation of national life, over which a tyrant's spirit still rules, forcing the poet to desperate -- and perhaps vain -- tactics for spiritual survival. The only hope seems to be the inference that in a world where public indifference smothers any hope of honest emotion, much as the sun is covered during a full eclipse, the poet's verses serve as a light amidst the darkness of apathy, as white nights are illuminated even in the early morning hours. The last two lines of the poem, however, loop in a dance-like circle of despair.

Soldiers' songs, which were the first Russian artistic expressions to emerge from the Afghan War, arguably have three antecedents from which to draw inspiration. The Soviet 'mass song', the soldiers' folksongs of the Great Patriotic War, and the

dissident underground songs of the guitar bards who began to sing in the 1960s all have affected the present generation of Afghan war songs. This art form started out as magnitizdat, which was suppressed by the authorities, and has evolved into an officially sponsored medium of expression to which professional writers as well as amateurs have contributed in recent years. The topic of the war has engaged the attention of emigre poets as well as citizens of the former USSR, and it has proven a testing ground for talented poets of the present generation. Common themes reflect not only patriotism, but also, at the other end of the spectrum, a rejection of the romantic image of war in the South as exemplified in the legacy of Lermontov's poem 'The Dream'. These young writers will no doubt continue the process of transforming the role of the war within the poetic imagination, and exploit the various portrayals of the conflict, whether political or lyrical, which at this stage, doubtless, have barely begun.

Chapter Five

Russian Fiction on the Soviet-Afghan War

This chapter will offer an overview of selected prose which is here held to be representative of Russian fiction written about the Afghan War up to the end of 1991. Overtly ideological literature will first be examined, by looking at selected books issued primarily by the military publishing house Voenizdat. The discussion will then move to new trends discernible in fiction by active-duty military writers who likewise appear in publications of the official military press such as Sovetskii voin and the patriotic almanac Podvig. The chapter will conclude with an analysis of recent works which have appeared in metropolitan literary journals both conservative and liberal, such as Nash sovremennik and Znamya, and in new journals which have appeared since the advent of glasnost. Discussion of the two most notable authors to date, Aleksandr Prokhanov and Oleg Ermakov, will be reserved for subsequent chapters.

Also, I will have occasion to refer in the remainder of this thesis to what might be described as a sub-genre of contemporary war literature: the 'platoon' story. Familiar at least since World War Two, when the strategy of mass movement across broad fronts was to some extent replaced by small-unit tactics, this type of story presents a small group of characters enclosed within a microcosm -- an army squad, for example, or a bomber or submarine crew -- and describes the reactions of different personalities to the crisis of combat. Within this tiny universe, the outcome of battle depends not only on the individual qualities of a leader or of his soldiers, but of their interaction as a team. This sub-genre is not necessarily confined to any one national literature, and its form is no more inherently ideological than any other. But if the 'platoon' story is used, then the personal interaction of the characters may project the author's view of the war in which those characters are engaged. This type of analysis

could be particularly useful in the context of Soviet war literature, where the portrayal of the 'masses', even on a microcosmic scale, carries an ideological message.

The first broad category of stories under discussion will be deemed to be literary propaganda. At one extreme, this literature purports to describe real people and events, but the text is distinguished by degree from certain types of similar publitsistika discussed in Chapter Three (Stars of Victory, Time Chose Us) in that the protagonists in literary propaganda are presented more as fictional characters within an extended dramatized 'plot', rather than as subjects of relatively brief reportage. The stories of Viktor Svetikov, Yury Teplov, Andrei Dmitrenko, and Viktor Vozovikov fit into this sub-category.[1] At the other extreme, literary propaganda employs traditional devices of fiction, employing non-existent characters in purely imaginary events. This sub-category includes works by Kim Selikhov, Eduard and Emiliya Topol, and Vladimir Rybakov. Both the 'propagandistic' and the 'literary' texts, however, maintain strict fidelity to a clearly defined political viewpoint, in this case either pro- or anti-Soviet.

Viktor Svetikov provides three examples of pro-regime documentary tales (dokumental'nye povesti), of approximately eighty pages each, based on actual people and events in his 1989 book Vershiny (The Heights).[2] The first story 'S lyubimymi ne rasstavaites'' ('Do Not Part With Loved Ones') portrays the struggle of Kostya Borozdin, a young officer who regains consciousness in a military hospital after suffering severe injuries in Afghanistan. His wife Nadya begins work at the trauma ward, and patiently nurses her husband back to health. The hero learns to walk again, has his face restored through plastic surgery, and anticipates entering an advanced military academy at the story's end. 'Poslednyaya granata' ('The Last Grenade') is a dramatic rendering of Lieutenant Aleksandr Demakov's heroism in saving his troops at the expense of his own life during an enemy attack. His body is later recovered amidst the mujahedin whom he has killed in his act of suicide. Lastly, the short story

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[1]No biographical information was found on these contemporary conformist writers.
[2]Svetikov, Vershiny.

'Vershiny' ('The Heights') portrays Afghan veteran Captain Chernozhukov as a rebel who returns to an overly bureaucratized domestic military organization. The narrative describes how this Hero of the Soviet Union upbraids a company commander for illegally crossing a river by bridge instead of by fording, and criticizes his troops for lack of initiative.

Svetikov draws openly from the officially approved Soviet literary canon of the Great Patriotic War to depict his heroes. 'Do Not Part With Loved Ones' is similar in theme to Boris Polevoi's World War Two novel The Story of a Real Man, wherein airman Aleksei Mares'ev courageously overcomes the loss of both legs, and considerable bureaucratic prohibitions, to fly his aircraft again. Svetikov's text even refers to Mares'ev's heroism as providing inspiration for Borozdin.[3] In 'The Last Grenade' Svetikov invokes World War Two author Konstantin Simonov:

> Was there an instant for Demakov, which Konstantin Simonov described during the war years: 'And in that hour, when one's hand raises the last grenade and in a brief instant one must remember everything that we still possess far away ...'? Who now can say ... (168)

Clearly understood symbolism abounds, such as the self-sacrifice incumbent upon members of the Communist Party: a bullet wounds a sergeant and also pierces his letter of acceptance into the Party (43). Great Russia's officially approved foreign and domestic enemies are also detailed. The mujahedin leader Rabbani is linked to the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (137), and the capture of two Englishmen provides the occasion for a digression on Britain's perfidious role in Afghan history (161-63). These stories contain instances of incipient glasnost, such as the narrator's observation that 'nothing to do with Afghanistan ever made it into the newspapers' (32). And the author addresses actual issues of contention within the army, notably when Chernozhukov criticizes two lieutenants for treating the soldiers like a 'caste of untouchables', and decries 'non-regulation relations' as a euphemistic label for a beating (195). The narrator refrains from using the term dedovshchina, though, and

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3Viktor Svetikov, 'S lyubimymi ne rasstavaites'', Vershiny 55. Subsequent references to this and other works under discussion will be included in the text after the initial citation.

his hero states that it rarely occurred in Afghanistan (196).[4] Otherwise, Svetikov takes aim only at the anodyne target of unspecified bureaucracy, as when Nadya and Kostya face difficulty obtaining holiday passes to a resort (69, 84).

As a further example of literary propaganda, AIST by Aleksei Dmitrenko is an 'artistic-documentary' tribute (khudozhestvenno-dokumental'naya povest') to Aleksandr Ivanovich Stovba, a young Ukrainian officer and poet who sacrificed his life for his comrades in Afghanistan.[5] The author proposes to paint a 'sociological portrait of a hero' (18) utilizing excerpts from the poet's own diaries and verse, along with testimonials from Stovba's friends and admirers. According to Dmitrenko's account, Stovba -- known by the nickname 'Aist' (an acronym formed from the initials of his first name and patronymic, and the first two letters of his surname) which means 'Stork', a Ukrainian and Russian symbol for Spring -- was raised in an idyllic domestic environment, and turned out to be an exemplary young officer whose patriotism co-existed comfortably with flights of poetic fancy. Few people knew of his writing during his lifetime, partly because his offerings were rejected by Molodaya gvardiya, Yunost', and Sovetskii voin. His notebooks were published posthumously due to his mother's efforts.

Dmitrenko's 556-page sociological portrait is unswervingly doctrinaire. Stovba's muse is born of solid proletarian lineage, including forefathers who fought Central Asian basmachi and Ukrainian 'bandits' (31). The Great Patriotic War is repeatedly invoked throughout the narrative as another implicit model for Stovba's heroism in Afghanistan (32, 103, 224, 408, etc.). In fact, Stovba's death is compared to the death of Lieutenant Knyazhko in Yury Bondarev's Great Patriotic War novel Bereg (The Coast) (462). The war effort in Afghanistan is depicted as a just struggle

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[4]The narrator also has Chernozhukov quote Bulat Okudzhava's 'Ballad of an "American" Soldier' without attribution: 'idesh' sebe, igraya avtomatom, Kak prosto byt' soldatom, soldatom'. (195) He does this to refute its supposedly exaggerated romanticism of military life. Okudzhava's satiric attack on this barracks mentality is anything but romantic, however, and his thinly-veiled anti-war message is directed not at America but at the Red Army (he was forced to add 'American' to the title). See Smith, Songs 127.

[5]Aleksei Dmitrenko, AIST (Kiev: Voenizdat, Kievskii filial, 1990) 14. The book was originally published by Izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury 'Dnipro' (Kiev, 1988).

against western imperialism represented by specific examples of political threats such as the Strategic Defence Initiative, ('Star Wars') (107), and Pershing cruise missiles at RAF Greenham Common (472-73). This threat is personified by a western mercenary found dead with an Israeli Uzi submachine gun in his hands (314). Decadence is represented by foreign cultures (other than Ukrainian and Russian) expressed in words of western origin: diskoteki, tantsy, kokteili, dzhinsy (467).

With its numerous recollections and letters, AIST resembles publitsistika such as Aleksievich's 'Zinc Boys'. The content differs significantly, however, by presenting a uniformly patriotic point of view, in which Dmitrenko sets about elevating the poet to the pantheon of orthodox Communist idols. Consequently, fulsome tribute is paid to the Communist Party, into which Stovba was inducted before his death (452); the symbolism used by Svetikov is repeated here, as mentioned earlier, when one comrade is described as dying from a bullet which pierces his Party card (281). Because the author's praise is so unstinting as to become a lyrical apotheosis, this book serves more as a failed artistic tribute to communism than a factual documentary. Indeed, many contributors, including Dmitrenko, never personally knew Stovba, and of those who did, many saw nothing remarkable in him (320, 419). Furthermore, little hard information on Afghanistan is to be found. This book won the 1987 Ukraine State Prize for Literature, perhaps in honour of the author's efforts in publicizing Stovba's poetry, and providing a forum through which relatives of soldiers killed in action could voice their grief.

'Granatovyi tsvet' ('Pomegranate Blossom') by reporter Yury Teplov is a 1987 tale (povest') which uses a composite character as central protagonist.[6] The plot concerns a newspaper journalist named Novikov who travels to Afghanistan on assignment; but he also has a personal mission to discover the author of an anonymous ballad entitled 'Pomegranate Blossom'. Once in Afghanistan, Novikov is ambushed while accompanying a shipment of rice to villagers; he witnesses the trial of a villainous

[6] Y. Teplov, 'Granatovyi tsvet', Vtoroi variant 286-366.

French doctor who treats only the mujahedin; and he meets Udut, a small boy who is adopted by a Soviet battalion after losing his hands in a mine explosion. Under a flag of truce, the reporter also visits a guerrilla leader deep in his mountain lair. At the story's conclusion, Novikov boards a helicopter to search for a soldier whom he has been informed might know about the original source of the song. The helicopter is struck by enemy fire, and the dramatic narrative ends with the pilot yelling at a heroically reluctant Novikov to don the only remaining parachute as the helicopter plunges to the ground.

In his afterword, the author claims that except for the hero, who is a composite, all the characters are real (360). In this case, however, reality again conforms closely to the Soviet ideological model as it does in Svetikov's book (to which, appropriately, Teplov contributed the introduction). Former enemies join the Afghan government; villains such as the French doctor ultimately meet a poetically justified death; and peasants, if given the choice, join the revolution (309). Soviets appear heroic: according to an 'old Afghan song', they are 'those enigmatic people with hair the colour of wheat and eyes like the waters of a mountain stream' (311). Stylistically, the story belies its documentary label by providing few tangible artefacts concerning the Soviet soldier's daily life. Even soldiers' expressions in dialogue are suppressed, as the colloquial 'zelenka' (the 'green zone' of foliage which provided cover for the enemy) becomes the formal 'zelenaya zona', perhaps for the reader's benefit (293). One concession to standard narrative devices is the metaphor of Novikov's financially secure yet failing marriage (287, 356), which seems destined to be improved by the hero's visit to the war zone. The marriage thus represents domestic Soviet complacency which will be eradicated only through the primitive yet altruistic school of international duty found in Afghanistan.

Moving further away from documentation, V gorakh dolgo svetaet (The Light Lasts Long in the Mountains) by V. S. Vozovikov, possesses a dramatic structure and

fictional characters.[7] Vozovikov, a reporter for Krasnaya zvezda, wrote this novel (roman) between 1981 and 1983, relating the adventures of two helicopter pilots, Captain Lopatkin and Lieutenant Karpukhin, who enter Afghanistan during the initial phase of the war. The plot involves a struggle between local peasants and Kara-Khan, the local rebel chieftain. The populace rises in a spontaneous manifestation of revolutionary solidarity against Kara-Khan, but he returns to destroy the village. Driving hostages before him, Kara-Khan and his men are chased into the mountains by helicopters, where the mujahedin leader succeeds in shooting down Lopatkin in his helicopter before finally being killed. Lopatkin, however, survives the crash, presumably to carry on the struggle.

Similar to Svetikov's works, Vozovikov's fiction is underpinned by a Marxist-Leninist, pro-Soviet ideology. An Afghan proletariat virtually non-existent in fact is given voice when workers from 'two factories in Jalalabad' send a message of greeting to the Soviet contingent imploring them not to leave (51). Images of imperialistic rapaciousness are invoked when Britain's invasion in the 1922 Third Afghan War is compared to the Allied intervention during the Russian Civil War (61). The implication is that contemporary western support for the mujahedin is yet another example of western capitalist efforts to undermine the latest socialist revolution. Moreover, the rebel leaders also fit the mould of avaricious capitalists, whereas Lopatkin quotes Lenin when he refuses to accept money for saving the life of a child (107). But Vozovikov employs an Islamic metaphor to justify Soviet intervention, when an Afghan craftsman who fashions swords of damask steel explains the mystery of the unique fine-grained pattern found in every blade. In order for a truly beautiful design to appear, the sword maker must keep before his eyes a previously forged blade while he hammers out the new one. Thus Allah has willed the Afghan people to keep before their eyes the Soviet pattern of government as they forge their own brand of socialism (311-13). Using the

[7] Vladimir Vozovikov, V gorakh dolgo svetaet (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1990).

Koran to justify Soviet intervention in Central Asia is a time-honoured tactic, and Vozovikov is only one of several authors to employ it for the Afghan War.[8]

Pro-Soviet propaganda in this novel describes Russia as a provider of social and economic blessings. Helicopters not only fire weapons but also transport flour (54). Afghan youths benefit from DOMA (Demokraticheskaya organizatsiya molodezhi Afganistana), the Soviet-backed Afghan organization equivalent to the Komsomol (41). The Afghans also are amazed to see a Tajik officer issuing orders to a Russian soldier. Explains a Russian, 'Our commander is a Ukrainian, his deputy is a Georgian, the Chief of Staff is a Russian, and no doubt every one of a hundred Soviet nationalities is represented in the ranks. We don't recognise any difference between people according to their nationality or faith' (45). Thus is established a model of ethnic harmony for Afghanistan, a nation which traditionally has been subject to tribal divisions.

Vozovikov's fictional characterizations are one-dimensional. The mujahedin leader Kara-Khan is a 'wounded wolf', associated with the bordellos of Antwerp and the gambling dens of Lausanne (66-68). His fanaticism causes him to foam at the mouth (161). Dialogue between sympathetic characters contains exchanges not seen in western novels for nearly a century: 'Perhaps we'll meet again? ... When one walks side by side with death, one begins to value every meeting with friends.' (112) No attempt is made to reproduce soldiers' jargon.

Another expression of support for the Soviet war effort is Kim Selikhov's 1983 novel Neob"yavlennaya voina (The Undeclared War).[9] The book is unique for depicting the first years of Soviet intervention exclusively through the eyes of Afghan characters. Salekh, a young Afghan metal worker, meets Dzhamiliya, a rich landowner's daughter who is also an underground agitator for the Afghan Communist Party. Together they take part in the 1978 April Revolution. Salekh then becomes a

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[8]In one case, it even predates the Soviet era. General Gippius, governor of the Ferghana oblast' in 1916, donned native costume and told a crowd of Muslims that the Koran specifically stated that it was the duty of every Muslim to 'help the white Tsar against the Germans'. The tactic was not successful. See Edward Dennis Sokol, The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1954) 88.

[9]Selikhov, Neob"yavlennaya voina.

double agent for Babrak Karmal's new regime. He infiltrates a mujahedin camp in Pakistan, and travels to Brussels to purchase weapons for a group of rebels created and financed by the CIA. He also becomes reacquainted with Dzhamiliya, whose new husband is secretly employed by the CIA to develop chemical weapons. When she is told of his work, she helps to steal the vital formula for the Afghan government in a confrontation which results in her husband's murder. In the denouement, the CIA-backed mujahedin group is captured inside Afghanistan as a result of Salekh's undercover work.

Selikhov's text is couched in orthodox Marxist-Leninist language. Workers are called the 'primary guardians of our nation' (167), while land reforms (50), literacy programs (30), and women's rights are touted as the political triumphs of the new regime. Dzhamiliya is attracted to Salekh because he is reading Gorky's novel Mother about the 1905 Russian revolution (15). Furthermore, the novel's propaganda is directed at favourite targets of the Soviet regime. Much of the plot is concerned with the machinations of the CIA, who are blamed for the split between the Khalq and Parcham factions of the Afghan Communist Party, and for controlling Prime Minister Amin (119, 197). Furthermore, just as the West accused the Soviets of using chemical weapons against the Afghans, so Soviet newspapers countered with articles about chemical grenades with American markings found in mujahedin arsenals, and this is reflected in the subplot concerning Dzhamiliya's husband.[10] Consistent with the censorship restrictions of that time concerning the Red Army's role in Afghanistan, no mention is made of Soviet intervention until an historical aside affirms that forces were introduced at the behest of the Afghan government (197). The Soviet military appears only peripherally, though heroically, and in a non-combat role: a Russian soldier captures a rebel in the streets of Kabul (201), and a helicopter pilot saves the life of a child who survives a village massacre (217-227).

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[10]For an article on the putative use of American-made chemical weapons by the mujahedin, see 'Zayavlenie pravitel'stva Afganistana', Krasnaya zvezda 21 Aug. 1980: 3.

At the opposite end of literary propaganda's ideological spectrum are two books by Russian emigre writers, Eduard and Emiliya Topol, and Vladimir Rybakov. Their portraits of the war are consistent with anti-Soviet, anti-communist propaganda. The Topols' Russkaya semerka (The Russian Seven) is a fast-paced novel belonging to the popular romance genre.[11] Aleksei Odalevsky is one of seven friends in the same military unit serving in Afghanistan. Aleksei promises Ulima, his Afghan lover, that after leaving the army he will find her son, who has been flown to an orphanage in the Soviet Union. At the same time, a childless emigre Russian princess named Tanya Gur-Odalevskaya wishes to continue her aristocratic bloodline, and is seeking her grandnephew Aleksei, who is heir to her fortune. She hires an American student named Judy to marry him for the purpose of facilitating his emigration. The plan is unwittingly foiled by the KGB, who want Aleksei to ensnare one of his former compatriots, Yury, who has fled to the Afghan guerrillas and is generating propaganda for the rebels. Aleksei instead murders two KGB agents, and flees with Judy on a perilous journey across the Soviet Union to the southern border. Aleksei uses five of his friends as stepping stones on the way to finding and returning Ulima's son to his homeland. At the novel's conclusion, the hero must choose between Judy and a life of wealth in the West, and Yury, who is battling communism from within Afghanistan. Duty bids him remain in Afghanistan despite Tanya's plans and Judy's love, and Aleksei is last seen walking with Yury along the rocky cliffs of an Afghan mountain range.

The Topols depict veterans as yet one more group of survivors within the 'immense labour camp' of the Soviet Union (222). This image is reinforced by an observation in which the authors equate soldiers with victims of concentration camps: every veteran has a tattoo on his left shoulder, although it only shows blood type and RH factor (176). Because they are 'prisoners', the 'afgantsy' must depend on their

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[11]Emiliya and Eduard Topol, Russkaya semerka (New York: Liberty, 1990).

own solidarity, as demonstrated when Aleksei is allowed to jump a food queue by a fellow veteran.

He walked up to a young fellow with a face somehow much more mature than his years, dressed in a rumpled soldier's greatcoat, which no doubt also served him as a blanket and pillow on a long journey. -- 'Afganets'? Aleksei quietly asked the soldier. (210)

Consistent with abilities bred in adversity, characterization of the veterans emphasizes their resourcefulness. For example, Nikolai has lost both legs in action, but is pictured stripped to the waist in the winter cold, vigorously chopping wood (182). Likewise, with only one arm, Fedor performs his Afghan songs on the electric organ in a heavy metal band (195). Serega, the villain of the group who lives in Dushanbe, controls a thriving import business in smuggled Afghan copies of the Koran (255). And Yury, who will later defect, has arranged a supply of electrical power to the town of Tapbil, making him a hero among the Afghan locals (10).[12]

Correspondences with Selikov's The Undeclared War include: the central role of the enemy's intelligence organization; the motivation of money for the ideological opponent; the protagonists' memories used as pretexts for the author's explication of history; and the sentimental parting of the lovers at the conclusion. And both novels can be placed not only in the literary propaganda genre but also within the spy or romance genres as well. Just as in The Russian Seven Gur-Odalevskaya owns a string of Florida hotels (85), in The Undeclared War Dzhamiliya drives an elegant Jaguar (16); similar to the attempted rape of Judy by Serega (255), Salekh has a desperate affair with a glamorous Afghan government spy, who in turn shares a romantic past with the leader of the CIA-backed mujahedin group (176). And while Gur-Odalevskaya visits the intrigue-filled Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan (318), Salekh

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[12]An actual episode identical to the electrification of the village is documented in Losoto 16. In this and other details, such as the physical layout of a Soviet camp in Afghanistan, The Russian Seven is well-researched. Additionally, the authors neatly anticipated the sudden interest within the Soviet Union in former members of the Russian nobility living either at home or in emigration. (See James Blitz, 'Russian Royalty Returns to Its Russian Roots', The Sunday Times (London) 28 July 1991: 13, and Juliet Butler, 'Tsars in Their Eyes', The Sunday Times Magazine 28 July 1991: 25.) Given this accuracy, it would be interesting to authenticate Aleksei's 'discovery' that orphans with Soviet fathers were being flown to various locations according to year: 1982, Alma-Ata; 1984, Perm'; 1985, Khabarovsk; etc. (205).

also travels to glittering Monaco while delving into the shady but exotic world of international arms trading (146-47, 178). Stylistically, the use of demotic language and explicit sex in The Russian Seven, combined with a considerably more engaging narrative, distinguishes this novel from its Soviet counterpart.[13] Indeed, this work by emigre authors provides the only instance known to this writer of a relationship between a Russian soldier and an Afghan woman as an integral part of a fictional plot.

Afgantsy by Vladimir Rybakov, another emigre author, contains two anti-Soviet stories on the Afghan War.[14] 'Desantnaya gruppa' ('Assault Group') follows Lieutenant Borisov's baptism of fire toward the war's end as cynicism replaces idealism in the Soviet contingent.[15] He leads a group of hardened combat veterans in an ambush of a mujahedin caravan. The mission is carried out successfully after Borisov is accepted by the experienced Sergeant Storonkov and his men. On a subsequent mission, a village sweep escalates into a massacre during which Borisov is fatally stabbed by a young boy.

The book's anti-Soviet message is conveyed in the juxtaposition of Borisov's naïvety with the combat veterans' version of reality as expressed primarily in their dialogue. In fact, much of the text takes the form of a monologue delivered by an embittered authority figure. The cynical Lieutenant Colonel Osokin initially informs the surprised young officer that rumours of imminent withdrawal are not a ruse to deceive the Americans (10). The colonel advises the lieutenant to heed his men, and the remaining narrative replaces Osokin with Sergeant Storonkov as mentor; he initiates the new platoon leader into the realities of life in the Soviet contingent. For example, Borisov learns that soldiers consider themselves partisans in style and philosophy rather than regular troops (55); that senior troops are formally allowed to consume two marijuana cigarettes every twenty-four hours ('plan po planu', puns a soldier); and that

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[13]The Russian Seven provides a veritable thesaurus of 'mat', the demotic and until recently unpublishable (in the Soviet Union, at least) subset of Russian spoken language.
[14]Vladimir Rybakov, Afgantsy (London: Overseas Publication Interchange, 1988).
[15]Rybakov, 'Desantnaya gruppa', Afgantsy 5-123.

their preferred entertainment is singing pre-Soviet White Guard songs (40-44). Storonkov lists the injustices perpetrated by the Soviet government against their own troops as a chorus of the soldiers cries out 'Right on!' ('Pravil'no!') at each bitter declaration (81).

This technique of couching propaganda in terms of conversational question-and-answer exchanges is also used in Rybakov's short story 'Vozvrashchenie' ('The Return'), set in the Soviet Union.[16] A young martial arts master returns home from the war overcome by ennui, and confesses to his lover the guilt he feels about having fought in Afghanistan. She forgives him, and reveals that she has given birth to his child some months earlier without telling him. This cathartic confession redeems the protagonist, and reintroduces him to society. Similar in style to the literature with which it does ideological battle, both stories by Rybakov suffer from wooden characterization and didacticism.[17]

Yet literary propaganda has not been the sole product of the official Soviet press during the last decade. Especially after 1989, military writers have made their own attempt to exploit glasnost, and in the process reflect the changing political priorities of the military establishment in the early 1990s. Lieutenant Colonel Nikolai Ivanov, a military journalist who travelled to Afghanistan on assignment and also received the medal 'For Valour' for combat duty during the first two years of the war, is one such example of a new breed of uniformed author. Ivanov is one of the most prolific of Afghan war writers, and has worked in different genres, including dramatic short story, satire, and the documentary 'novel-chronicle'.[18] Because his stories are published in military journals such as Sovetskii voin, they may be compared to the

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[16]Rybakov, 'Vozvrashchenie', Afgantsy 124-39.

[17]See also a negative review by John Murray, 'Vladimir Rybakov, Afgantsy', Irish Slavonic Studies 10 (1989): 109-10. Rybakov is also the author of other fiction about the Soviet army such as Tyazhest' (Frankfurt: Possev, 1977), and Tiski: armeiskie ocherki (Frankfurt: Possev, 1985).

[18]Along with the works discussed in this chapter, he has also written other stories about the war, including his first two efforts 'Groza nad Gindukushem' ('Thunder Over The Hindu Kush') and 'Rassvety Saura' ('The Dawns of April'), as cited without date or place of publication in Nikolai Ivanov, 'Ogranichennyi kontingent', Sovetskii voin 10 (1991): 13

literary propaganda discussed previously to see how they reflect changing attitudes within the army concerning acceptable levels of dissent and proper targets of criticism.

Ivanov's collection of five stories "Al'kor" prinimaet vyzov ("Alcor" Accepts the Challenge) carries a subtext of political protest, voiced both by the third-person narrator and central characters, which would have been considered radical in the mid-1980s.[19] The title of the lead story, 'Den' za tri' ('One Day For Three') refers to the three days of active duty service credited to soldiers for each day of duty served in Afghanistan, and the theme suggests that this seemingly generous incentive to career soldiers is not worth the danger incurred.[20] In this story, Lieutenant Kostya Verkhovodov's supply column is diverted to a village where the food of a newly-established orphanage has been poisoned by the mujahedin. Meanwhile, a parallel plot follows the misfortunes of Rokotov, a helicopter pilot who has been shot down and taken prisoner. Rokotov organizes an escape with other Soviet soldiers already in captivity, and nearly reaches Verkhovodov's column before being treacherously shot by a fellow prisoner under the rebel leader's control. Finally, Verkhovodov suffers the ignominy of a lorry crash while returning to base after a fruitless attempt to meet with his sister across the Soviet border.

Ivanov emphasizes the dedication exhibited by Soviet soldiers in the face of extreme risk: Rokotov's co-pilot throws himself from a cliff to avoid capture, while another prisoner has been reduced to imbecility by torture (30-33). But the author also suggests that Soviet political leaders have no faith in their own soldiers. Thus, Ivanov explains that orphans were not usually sent to fight in Afghanistan because it was feared they would have no incentive to remain loyal if taken prisoner; yet the author emphasizes that Rokotov's co-pilot, himself an orphan, certainly does not betray the Soviet Union (30).[21] In similar fashion, a fellow prisoner of Rokotov's expresses

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[19]Nikolai Ivanov, "Al'kor" prinimaet vyzov. "Alcor", the name of a star, is used as a radio callsign.
[20]Ivanov, 'Den' za tri', "Al'kor" 3-92.
[21]Orphans feature in a surprising number of Afghan war stories: Sergeant Kalita (Sergei Dyshev, 'Kapitan Gorelyi', Podvig 38 (1991): 149); Warrant Officer Stetsenko (Dyshev, 'I svoei nevyskazannoi bol'yu ...', Yunost' 1 (1991): 38); Vintyunya Red'kin (Sergei Ionin, 'V tikhom kishlake', Podvig 37

outrage upon hearing that returning prisoners of war have been granted amnesty by the Soviet government, since amnesty is tantamount to equating prisoners with traitors (34). Even the rebel leader tells Rokotov that as a prisoner of war, his fate is sealed even if he survives to return home. 'They [the Soviets] will understand you as a human being', he says, 'but they won't forgive you as a soldier.' (57)

Yet there are markers which indicate that this is officially sanctioned prose. The character of the rebel leader Izatulla is stereotyped, marked by possession of foreign artefacts which connote ideological contamination. Izatulla's table is strewn with Fanta sodas, and mention is made of his economics studies in England (57). The one disloyal Soviet character, Sergeant Ivan Zayavka, who shoots Rokotov, is captured in a market stall while purchasing foreign-made jeans (35). Additionally, Ivanov, through the character of Rokotov, makes clear his view that where the fate of returning Soviet prisoners of war is concerned, the mujahedin leader's conception is an antiquated view more suited to World War Two. The loyalty of Soviet soldier Aslambek is also emphasized. 'We call him "Sasha"', says a Russian comrade, as if to prove their faith in the Central Asian's devotion to the Soviet cause (35).

Ivanov's other stories also communicate ambiguous political messages.[22] 'Kombat Egorychev' ('Battalion Commander Egorychev') depicts the eponymous hero, a dedicated Communist, as an overzealous 'Rambo' who irresponsibly advances on an enemy position just as it comes under Soviet air attack.[23] '"Al'kor" prinimaet vyzov' ('"Alcor" Accepts the Challenge') openly criticizes nepotism and corruption in the army and the Party. The villain, Colonel Zubov, is a political department chief who has used his wife's influence in Moscow to further his career (302). And Ivanov uses his last story, 'My vernemsya zhivymi' ('We Will Return Alive') to examine the sensitive themes of guilt and resentment felt by the veterans of the war. In this story,

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(1990): 135). Too young to have fathers who would have been killed in the Great Patriotic War, these characters instead seem to represent a war for which no one wishes to take responsibility.

[22]Ivanov, 'Kombat Egorychev', 'Al'kor' 93-145; '"Al'kor" prinimaet vyzov' 203-312; 'My vernemsya zhivymi' 313-56.

[23]Rambo is the name of the disaffected Vietnam veteran in Sylvester Stallone's popular films.

Private Boris Chumichev's return is marked by broken relationships, despair, and violence. Chumichev's girlfriend is now married to another man (315); his former sergeant, now a teacher, decries the lack of moral discipline in the schools (343); and one of Chumichev's comrades who became a militia man is murdered (350).

But Ivanov's political agenda is not anti-communist, as Party members figure among his protagonists. Instead, Ivanov apparently has used a conservative platform to fight not only against liberals who first subjected the military to scathing attack under Gorbachev's policy of glasnost, but also against corruption within the Communist Party. In his fight for the preservation of the army's honour, Ivanov uses his narrative authority to refute charges raised in such works as Aleksievich's 'Zink Boys'. For example:

> Someone tried to tar the women's barracks with the nickname 'Cat House' ... but the name didn't stick. Affection between females and males of the little city certainly arose, but, to the relief of the political officers, things never reached the stage of orgies or duels ... In a word, normal human life prevailed throughout the little city ... everything was indeed normal and human. (104-05)

The repetition of the word 'normal' by the omniscient third-person narrator emphasizes this agenda.

Accompanying this defence of soldiers' honour is Ivanov's apparent notion that a messianic mission exists for Afghan veterans. In 'We Will Return Alive' Chumichev ultimately decides to join the militia in honour of his dead friend, and concludes that the only thing more important than the priority of returning home alive, embodied by his careerist friend Kolpachikov, is returning with honour (356). Thus Chumichev's conflict with society symbolizes not the veterans' defeat, but rather their painful emergence as a moral force in Soviet life. Indeed, Senior Lieutenant Voronov, the hero of the 'Alcor' stories, is heroically rebellious precisely because of his tempering in Afghanistan. His activist values clash with those of a corrupt peacetime bureaucracy: he is charged with abandoning a comrade under fire, faces complaints of hooliganism, and is maligned by his commander for refusing to voluntarily initiate 'socialist competition'. For good measure, he stands accused by a soldier's mother of accepting

a jar of honey in return for keeping another man's son out of the fighting. With the help of Colonel Tsvetov, fellow Afghan veteran and Hero of the Soviet Union, however, the charges against Voronov are proved to be unfounded.

Ivanov, although exhibiting a certain courage for attacking the abuse of rank and party membership, fails to display the stylistic rebelliousness he finds so praiseworthy in his protagonists. Similar to Vladimir Rybakov's anti-Soviet monologues, Ivanov apparently uses his central character as a straightforward mouthpiece for his own political beliefs in conventional question-and-answer exchanges. His presentation of the conflict of duty versus compassion, for example, is weakened by having the main character simply lecture the reader (116). Likewise, Ivanov's depiction of romantic relationships, such as the love triangle of Voronov, Rita, and Tanya in the Alcor stories, concludes on a predictably happy note for the hero. Thus Ivanov's stories remain conventional in tone, and conservative in ideology.

Four stories appearing in the patriotic literary almanac Podvig (geroiko-patrioticheskii literaturno-khudozhestvennyi al'manakh), published by Molodaya gvardiya, provide additional markers as to what the official military press considers acceptable. The story 'Zamena' ('The Replacement') by Afghan veteran Major Andrei Dyshev depicts the complex network of local allegiances in Afghan villages, which proved problematic for the Soviet authorities.[24] Oborin is an unconventional officer who has established a truce with a mujahedin leader named Dzhamal. As a result, Oborin is accused of pacifism and contributing to an increase in enemy activity in adjacent regions. His replacement, the narrator of the story, is pressured to capture Dzhamal, who is now under suspicion of having attacked a Soviet column. When Dzhamal is killed in battle, the local Afghan party secretary reveals that the Afghan leader had been fighting for the Soviet cause against their common mujahedin enemy. Without political rhetoric, this story depicts the dilemma of choosing between a practical solution and an idealistic yet costly policy of non-compromise.

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[24]Andrei Dyshev, 'Zamena', Podvig 34 (1989): 17-64.

A. Igumnov's 1990 story 'Vystrel v doline' ('A Shot in the Valley') also focuses on human destruction, this time visited by the Russians upon innocent victims.[25] A helicopter comes under sniper fire while scouting caravans near the Pakistani border, and the Soviet commander orders the valley to be bombed in retaliation. At the story's conclusion, the narrator describes the ensuing indiscriminate slaughter carried out by ground attack aircraft which he directs from his airborne perch. Igumnov's theme is the guilt shared by various characters over the unjustified killing of innocent Afghans during the bombing raid. The narrator cannot understand how his radio transmission about a single bullet hole in the helicopter results in the loss of hundreds of innocent lives (154). The staff colonel at the base assuages his guilt by trumpeting the reconnaissance report of six hundred enemy killed, despite the narrator's cynical observation that some of the enemy were wearing skirts (155). Igumnov increases the verisimilitude of his story through observations which document the unpredictable nature of battle, but also add to the ironic mood of the story. For example, the narrator observes that although he functions as an airborne forward air controller, the fighter pilots soon tell him not to interfere, and proceed to bomb indiscriminately (154). The author includes satiric observations by observing that the staff officers award themselves medals as if by lottery (151); moreover, the name of the commander who orders the mission, Colonel Povarev, invites comparison of staff officers to cooks.

Sergei Ionin's pessimistic stories make the first attempts since Kim Selikhov's novel to show the war from a variety of Afghan perspectives. 'V tikhom kishlake' ('In a Quiet Village') opens as Ali, a dervish priest who lives in a holy sepulchre, is subjected to peremptory interrogation concerning enemy activities by Major Krylov.[26] The old priest collapses in outrage over the sacrilegious trespass. But the mujahedin have indeed organized a village unit, which is planning to ambush a detachment of

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[25]A. Igumnov, 'Vystrel v doline', Podvig 37 (1990): 148-55. The table of contents lists the story as 'Vystrely v doline', a typographic error pluralizing 'A Shot'.
[26]Ionin, 'V tikhom kishlake'.

Major Krylov's battalion. The guerrillas surprise the detachment, and retreat to their village with a prisoner, Slavka Demikov. They negotiate their own safe passage in return for the exchange of Demikov, but execute him before escaping through an underground irrigation tunnel. The Soviets in turn destroy the village by artillery fire. Ionin's story 'Biki-bikim i Gulyaev' ('Biki-bikim and Gulyaev') depicts an Afghan orphan who is unofficially adopted by Warrant Officer Gulyaev.[27] After he has been forced by his commander to give the child up, he and the young girl are murdered by a mujahedin sympathizer.

While both plots hinge on mujahedin perfidy, Ionin makes an attempt to apportion culpability to both sides in the war with 'In a Quiet Village'. Major Krylov clearly transgresses the bounds of respect accorded to holy men (132), while Seiid Daud, the young mujahedin lieutenant, breaks his promise to return the prisoner (147). At the end of the story, an Afghan man sympathetic to the Russians watches in terror as his mother dies under Soviet bombardment, while the mother of a slain Soviet soldier breaks down after receiving the news of her son's death (147). At the same time, Ionin depicts the 'normal' daily life of a typically 'quiet village', as a woman bakes bread while her daughter recites prayers. To add an Eastern flavour, the text is somewhat artificially sprinkled with referenced foreign terms, and the holy man's death is depicted in popular images: 'his soul became a falcon' (138).

Sergei Belikov's short story 'Chuzhoe nebo' ('Alien Sky') also focuses on despair.[28] Lieutenant Soloshchenko survives a helicopter crash, and nurses broken ribs and an injured leg in an attempt to reach friendly territory. While stopping for water at a stream, he is sighted by an Afghan girl. He condemns himself to death by allowing her to live, knowing she will report him to her elders. In the subsequent pursuit, he throws himself from a cliff to elude capture. This story not only emphasizes the central character's moral choice, but also demonstrates his heroic stature during a painful trek across country. In conquering pain, hunger, thirst, and isolation,

[27]Sergei Ionin, 'Bibi-bikim i Gulyaev' in L. Teplov 71-85.
[28]Sergei Belikov, 'Chuzhoe nebo', Podvig 34 (1989): 65-74.

he overcomes not the enemy but himself. Thus, a limited victory is achieved in a war which gave the Soviets little reason to celebrate in fiction any purely military achievements.

The official organs of the military press have also printed stories about returning soldiers, a topic fraught with even more implications for political protest over poor treatment of veterans, and the soldiers' bitterness from having been made to fight an 'unjust' war. Two such short stories found in the conservative, patriotic almanac Podvig are N. Zakalyukin's 'A zhizn' prodolzhaetsya ...' ('But Life Continues ...') and V. Vasil'ev's 'Prosti, kombat!' ('Good-bye, Battalion Commander!').[29] Zakalyukin's story uses minimal plot to describe the narrator's search for meaning to his war experiences, his attempt to be heard by singing Afghan songs (249), and his attempt to teach others by discussing his Afghan experiences with schoolchildren. The narrator describes the condescension of authority figures who ignore demands for housing (250), accusations of malingering directed at his friend Andrei (252), and insensitive questions aimed at veterans ('Were you a 'granddad' [who harrassed your own troops]?') (251). At the same time, the narrator admits inability to express the horror of war, to convey his own feelings, or even to know truth (249). Instead, the narrated voice is an attempt to break through the barriers of ignorance separating veteran and society.

In similar vein, V. Vasil'ev's story briefly but effectively depicts the plight of the returning invalid. The narrator describes in colloquial language the release from hospital of a captain who is left to fend for himself once beyond the institution's gates. After a two-hour wait in the rain, the narrator and a friend named Val'ka finally help him to hail a taxi. The ending is ironic, as the narrator describes how both he and Val'ka, having observed the captain's departure, decide to smoke cigarettes. 'Val'ka holds a match box with his left hand, while I get a match and strike it with my right.'

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[29]N. Zakalyukin, 'A zhizn' prodolzhaetsya ...', Podvig 34 (1989): 248-52; V. Vasil'ev, 'Prosti, kombat!', Podvig 34 (1989): 245-47.

(247) Thus the author emphasizes the apathy of society toward the war's victims, and the veterans' realization that they can only depend on themselves.

Andrei Dyshev's 1990 story 'Synok' ('Sonny Boy') presents this theme in less obvious fashion.[30] Geshka, a general's son, is placed under the unofficial protection of a family friend, Colonel Kochin, while in Afghanistan. Geshka accidentally discovers that Colonel Kochin is his mother's lover, and to escape the situation he volunteers for combat. When he returns home wounded, his materialistic girlfriend abandons him. His father now seems a broken man, and the warrant officer who allowed him to participate in combat has been relieved of duty. The story ends as Geshka walks naked into the snow and loses consciousness, presumably to freeze to death. But this story seems to portray Geshka's despair as a product of individual circumstances rather than a result of the war. After all, this alienated youth does not take the trouble to find out the first name of his mountain-climbing partner who falls to his death at the outset of the story (13). Thus, at the thematic level this narrative exposes official patronage but is also a character study of one individual who is paradoxically destroyed by his privileged upbringing. Geshka is an 'eternal son' unable to exhibit initiative or affect the course of events, whether in Afghanistan or at home. That the author felt able to treat this contentious issue without being entrapped by political issues is perhaps another indication of the freedom enjoyed by the newest wave of contemporary military writers.

Meanwhile, new almanacs, along with the established 'thick' journals, were leading the way with prose which was far more innovative than that of even the most daring of military publications. The 1988 story 'On byl moi samyi luchshii drug' ('He Was My Best Friend') by Oleg Khandus is one of the first Soviet narratives about the war to assume an individual non-political voice.[31] His story concerns a Soviet unit which comes under fire from a rooftop during a village sweep. Leshka, the narrator's

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[30]Andrei Dyshev, 'Synok', Sovetskii voin 12 (1990): 13-22.
[31]Khandus, 59-63.

friend, decides to use grenades to destroy the building and the sniper. Afterwards, the soldiers search the ruins for a weapons cache, but instead find the dead bodies of a young mother, her newborn baby, and a midwife. That night, Leshka disappears to seek forgiveness in the village, and his remains are found the next day.

The Soviet critic Petr Tkachenko quoted the story's opening paragraph as an example of an unfairly negative portrayal of Soviet soldiers who fought in Afghanistan.

> Later on it was enjoyable to burst into strange houses, breaking locks with the butt of a rifle, shattering dilapidated doors with kicks from heavy boots. Nothing like it! Simply stand in the middle of an alleyway, amidst colourful market stalls, with legs confidently apart, fingers on the cool metal of an automatic rifle. To sense the frightened glances of the peasants. There was something ecstatic in it, something intoxicating ... (59)

Tkachenko cautions readers that Valentin Luk'yanin, the editor of the fledgling journal Ural, purposefully solicited works from authors who would '"devote an unprecedented amount of space to personal moods and motives."'[32] Indeed, the image of the violent soldier in the street focuses on the spiritual vacuum created by war rather than any obvious ideological position. Just as these soldiers are isolated from ordinary social intercourse, the narrator is detached from ordinary Soviet life. After returning home a hero, the narrator notes that his romanticized war stories 'were deceptive. Yul'ka took wing and flew away -- she was the first to notice. I also struck her, it seems' (60). But such a veteran is also attuned to injustices. He overhears a waitress in a cafe tell her girlfriend, 'I think he's some sort of Afghan veteran. Sometimes he scares me -- that lot can kill' (61). Yet the waitress is giving her friend a package of meat which she has casually stolen from the restaurant. In this context, the veteran's potential to 'kill' takes on added scope; perhaps he is feared because he has the ability and the anger to destroy a corrupt society.

Fedor Oshevnev's story 'Da minuet vas chasha siya' ('Let This Cup Pass From You') is also devoid of explicit ideology.[33] This first-person narrative concerns a captain who is the victim of a terrible atrocity in Afghanistan -- the intentional

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[32]Tkachenko, 'Kak ty zhivesh', moi drug i brat?...'.
[33]Fedor Oshevnev, 'Da minuet vas chasha siya', Literaturnaya ucheba 4 (1989): 79-98.

amputation of his four limbs by the enemy. After rescue and subsequent hospitalization, he discovers that his pregnant wife has aborted her child and seeks divorce. The hero then suffers taunts from neighbourhood children, malicious gossip from neighbours, and humiliation with a prostitute. The story ends with his mother offering herself to him sexually after the prostitute refuses to return.

This story is more a non-literary exposé on the fate of invalid veterans than a finished work of fiction, as Yury Loshchits, editor and poet of the Afghan war, notes. 'Editors were tempted to smooth the rough edges,' he writes, 'but they refrained from doing so.'[34] For example, the Christian frame of reference implied in the title is not invoked beyond the obvious implications for the theme.[35] Justifying his decision to print such an unpolished product, Loshchits blamed professional writers for ignoring the conflict out of political or ideological considerations, leaving untutored soldiers as the only chroniclers. So this story seems to be an attempt to shock a national audience out of complacency about the tragedy suffered by disabled veterans, and appears to have been drawn from a legend which gained currency among the Soviet contingent in Afghanistan. Stories about special hospitals for amputation circulated among soldiers, perhaps from seeing dead comrades whose bodies had been mutilated.[36]

Sergei Dyshev's approach has evolved considerably over the period of his brief writing career, and may be said to form a bridge between those authors appearing in conservative military publications and those who now seek a broader forum. Sergei Dyshev (not to be confused with Andrei) was born in 1956 in Vologdoshin. A graduate of Lvov Higher Military-Political Institute and the Lenin Military-Political

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[34]Yury Loshchits, 'Ne pozdno ispravit'!', Literaturnaya ucheba 4 (1989): 79.

[35]Matthew 36. 39: 'Da minuet Menya chasha eta'.

[36]'Let This Cup Pass From You' alludes to the creation of a network of mujahedin 'hospitals' for amputating the limbs of Soviet 'infidels' (91). There is another legend on this theme, about a soldier whose still living body, minus limbs, eyes, and ears, was left near a Soviet outpost after having undergone an operation in just such a specially designated mujahedin hospital. For example, see Ivanov, 'Den' za tri' 16; also Belikov, 'Chuzhoe nebo' 67; also Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Rodnen'kii', Tretii tost (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1991) 121-26, for the theme of emasculation and crucifixion. These gruesome stories serve the same function of dehumanizing the adversary as did myths about the German Tallow Works (which supposedly changed corpses to candles) and the Crucified Canadian (who was allegedly nailed to a cross in view of his comrades) which circulated amongst the Allied troops on the Western Front during World War I. See Fussell 116-17.

Academy, he participated in combat operations in Afghanistan from 1982 to 1984 in his capacity as correspondent for the Turkistan Military District newspaper Frunzevets (2).[37] His 1988 story 'Pulya na ladoni' ('A Bullet in the Palm of Your Hand') published in Podvig is a conventional elegy to Vladimir Khizhnyak, a fictional political officer, as seen through the eyes of fellow officer Sergei Chitaev.[38] The story involves their search for a group of Soviet civilian construction engineers whose bus has been hijacked by the mujahedin. Pursued by Chitaev's units, the rebels take their prisoners into the mountains, but the Soviets track them down with the help of Colonel Aziz, the Afghan secret police (KHAD) commander. In the final rescue of the Soviet civilians, Khizhnyak is killed trying to protect an Afghan child who has run into the line of fire.

In this 'platoon' story the psychological interaction of the soldiers occupies centre stage. Unlike Svetikov's hagiographies, Dyshev includes a realistic portrayal of personality conflicts within the unit: regimental commander Colonel Tubol does not get on with battalion commander Major Vorontsov, while Chitaev and fellow lieutenant Vodovozov likewise share a mutual enmity. Furthermore, Private Bratus' goes mad with fear and exhaustion in combat (72). Ideological lines are well-defined, however, in depicting the enemy forces. They include an anti-Soviet European named Ritchenko whose father served under Hitler before escaping to the West with the Americans (75). Among the supporters of the mujahedin the author also includes 'American and Pakistani officer-instructors who live separately in comfortably-equipped underground bunkers' (53). The only concession to the complex ideological boundaries of the war is the revelation that Dzhelaini, the mujahed leader, and Colonel Aziz, the KHAD commander, are brothers. The story is remarkable for incorporating Soviet civilians into the plot.

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[37]Sergei Dyshev, 'Da vozdastsya...', Yunost' 8 (1989): 2-21.
[38]Sergei Dyshev, 'Pulya na ladoni', Podvig 32 (1988): 37-100.

The tone of Dyshev's 1991 fictional account published in Yunost' of an ill-fated search-and-destroy mission entitled 'I svoei nevyskazannoi bol'yu...' ('And With Your Unspoken Anguish') differs drastically from the previous tale by removing any suggestion of an ideological agenda.[39] Captain Shevchuk's company sets out to capture a gorge presumably located in the Panjsher Valley, which is held by one of Masud's mujahedin units. A series of bloody encounters with the enemy is compounded by loss of life due to personal vendettas within the Soviet unit. Over the radio, Shevchuk is promised helicopter support, which he knows will never arrive. With any hope of victory stalemated, the troops are only waiting to pull out at the end of the story when Shevchuk loses his life to an enemy grenade.

Dyshev sets the tone of futility by describing a landscape devoid of colour.

> Shevchuk noted to himself that all the faces were completely indistinguishable, reflecting neither malicious joy nor surprise nor sympathy. But he wasn't amazed, since he also felt this same inner vacuum, although tinged, perhaps, with annoyance -- at whom or what, he didn't know.... In the grey village, under a grey sky, among endless grey mountains, he felt tired and empty. (22)

Low morale is also reflected in the sentiments of the characters. Lieutenant Colonel Gerasimov, a Hero of the Soviet Union, feels drowned in 'socialist competition, accounts, reports, official inquiries and inspections administered by petty officials from Moscow and the district' (23).[40] The futility of their operation is such that when Shevchuk receives news under fire that he has been appointed to the battalion staff, he likens the gesture to the meaningless field promotion of doomed Nazi General von Paulus at the battle of Stalingrad during World War Two (36). This 'platoon' story depicts the military socialist collective in disarray.

Dyshev likewise has chosen to employ realistic dialogue to complement his uncompromising description of the war. A soldier casually converses with his compatriot: 'A skazhi, zachem dukhi dekhkanam krutyat na 'vidikakh' pornukhu i

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[39] S. Dyshev, 'I svoei...'.

[40] Early in the war, one hypothesis advanced by western intelligence agencies purporting to reveal the Soviets' intent for long-term domination of Afghanistan was based in part on speculation that military commanders had administratively incorporated Afghanistan into the Kazakhstan Military District. In this context, it would be interesting to know which 'district' ('okrug') Gersimov has in mind when he complains about official harrassment.

govoryat, chto to zhe samoe shuravi budut vytvoryat' s ikhnimi khanumkami?' (26) This character's speech incorporates sub-standard conversational Russian ('vytvoryat'' -- become involved with; 'ikhnimi' -- their); military jargon ('dukhi' -- mujahedin); contemporary slang ('vidiki' -- video films; 'pornukha' -- pornography); and terms borrowed from Farsi ('dekhkan' -- peasant; 'shuravi' -- Soviet; 'khanum' -- woman). Thus the characters are identified with a specific conflict and a specific army, which is not the case with dialogue from many stories printed in the 1980s.

Another 1991 story by Dyshev entitled 'Da vozdastsya ...' ('May They Be Rewarded ...') combines lyricism with a dramatic narrative.[41] Stepan Prokhorov's unit, exhausted from the previous mission, is immediately re-assigned by its dictatorial battalion commander to find and destroy a mujahedin unit. Instead they are ambushed, and the wounded Prokhorov is dragged to a cave by his hometown friend Zhen'ka. Prokhorov regains consciousness, finds the mutilated bodies of his comrades, and wanders in an exhausted state for the next few days before being captured by an enemy detachment. Fortunately, the unit defects to the Russians, and Prokhorov serves as their guarantee of safety. After rescue, Prokhorov is hospitalized with amnesia, and cannot be identified since he is presumed dead; a personal letter which earlier he had given to Zhen'ka was mistakenly used to identify his friend's mutilated body. At the conclusion, Prokhorov reaches home, and the village discovers that the victim they thought had been buried is still alive. Prokhorov then tells Zhen'ka's father the tale of his son's bravery.

Dyshev registers several apparent political protests, one of which is expressed by depicting the disillusionment of homecoming. Prokhorov's trip documents: the mandatory bribe to the cashier to obtain an aeroplane ticket in Tashkent; the insults suffered in a cafe after being refused a bottle of vodka due to his youth; and the news that his girlfriend has recently married (19). Furthermore, Prokhorov believes that the war arose from the simple wish of a man whose 'bushy eyebrows converged between

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[41] S. Dyshev, 'Da vozdastsya'.

the eyes' (4).[42] And the author probably voices some Central Asians' anti-war sentiments when he describes a Soviet Uzbek soldier named Saidov as a perplexed young man who does not speak Russian, is drafted, loaded down with weapons and placed aboard a helicopter to shoot at unknown targets on his commander's order (4).

But the author also incorporates a lyrical element into the narrative. During the hero's cross-country trek in a state of physical and mental exhaustion, he observes a group of armed Afghans silently pass his hiding place, and compares farmers in the field at their midday meal with the memory of his own parents during a Russian harvest (11). Later in hospital he imagines his own death, and has a vision of his dead comrades marching across the mountains without noticing anything around them (15). The images are evocative in their own right; moreover, within the hero's subconscious mind, the peasants and soldiers of both sides have become indistinguishable.

This lyrical vision is shared by one of the most talented and versatile of writers to appear thus far, a veteran named Aleksandr Segen', who was born in 1959 in Moscow, and completed his undergraduate and post-graduate studies at the Moscow Literary Institute. A member of the Union of Writers, he currently writes not only fiction, but also essays and articles on Russian literature. His short story 'Zhara' ('Heat') published in Slovo 88, crosses the boundary of pure war literature by virtue of focusing on a non-combatant who never leaves the Soviet Union.[43] The protagonist, a divorced man named Sveshnikov who is employed at an unnamed Moscow institute, travels to a Tashkent hospital to see his son Serezha, who has reportedly lost both legs in Afghanistan. Arriving at the hospital too late for visiting hours, Sveshnikov learns from a desk orderly that his son has only suffered a relatively minor shoulder wound. Relieved, he strikes up an acquaintance at the hotel with a married woman whom he noticed on the plane trip south, and they spend the night together. The next day proves disillusioning: Katya suffers from guilt over her infidelity, and Sveshnikov discovers

[42]This reference to Brezhnev seems to resemble Solzhenitsyn's famous allusion to Stalin's moustache, which earned the writer his sentence in the labour camps.
[43]Aleksandr Segen', 'Zhara', Slovo 88 (Moscow: Sovremennik, 1989) 7-17.

at the hospital that his son has indeed lost both of his legs. A strained conversation between father and son ends prematurely on Serezha's demand that Sveshnikov never visit him again. Afterward, Sveshnikov's final plea to Katya to leave her husband and move in with him is to no avail, and they part, probably forever.

Segen' integrates the theme of the Afghan war into the fabric of everyday Soviet life, employing mundane detail to emphasize the gulf between the world of a middle-aged disaffected urban intellectual, and a physically traumatized young veteran. Katya wears a 'raspberry-red' sport shirt emblazoned with the name 'Chicago'; the author also notes that Sveshnikov sits in seat 5B on the aeroplane, and pays eight rubles fifty kopecks for his luxury hotel suite (9). Meanwhile, an orderly runs 'a dirty fingernail' down a list of names to locate the room where Sveshnikov's son is lying. Furthermore, the alienation between son and father is made palpable prior to their argument through Sveshnikov's inappropriate gifts of strawberries and eau-de-cologne (14). And finally, leaving the hospital for the last time, Sveshnikov passes a visiting group from the Union of Writers who are being lectured about the excellent morale in hospital, while Sveshnikov is mocked by bitter disabled veterans (15). Perhaps the observations of several Soviet critics implicitly emphasize this gulf by noting that the father-son relationship has now become reversed. Sveshnikov feels that his son 'is now my father' (14).[44] These metaphors represent the dissonance between Sveshnikov's inner and outer lives, the gulf between father and son, and the chasm between veteran and society.

Segen' neatly weaves together and implicitly compares the losses caused by war with those incurred in normal contemporary life, the latter in some ways no less brutal than the former. Sveshnikov dreams that his former wife gives birth to a baby girl. 'Since you ruined my son, I decided to secretly give birth to a girl. The army won't take away a girl' (7). The story thus concentrates on the subtle effect of an unpublicized war on a nation which for the most part only experienced the pain of the

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[44]See Tkachenko, 'My eshche ne vernulis"; and Ol'shansky 15.

fighting through its victims, yet in the end suffered no less spiritual damage than the soldiers. As a symbol of a people under no physical danger yet suffering emotional damage, Katya describes the discord between a lively, extroverted artist and his anguished canvasses (16). This loss echoes the thwarted passions of Yury Trifonov's characters in stories such as 'The Exchange', in which the gradual decline of ideals suddenly erupts amidst a daily routine to expose a spiritual vacuum which tears personal lives asunder.

Segen' switches to phantasmagoria for his most recent effort, 'Zabludivshiisya BTR' ('The BTR That Lost Its Way').[45] Senior Lieutenant Al'bert Mityashin commands a special forces unit which ambushes enemy caravans. During one mission Mityashin's BTR hits a mine, and from this point onward dreams assume the aspect of reality, as the BTR crew embark on a mystical journey. Mityashin converses with the body of a dead crewman which mysteriously reanimates itself in his presence, the crew are feted in a village of Tajiks, and with the aid of magic they defend a fortress against the mujahedin. In the end Mityashin and his crew come upon a magnificent palace, and its inhabitants welcome them to a paradise for Soviet veterans. The slightly mad, seriocomic vision is disrupted when Al'bert finally regains consciousness in a Kabul hospital. The story closes as the hero allows himself to drift back in his imagination to the fantastic journey he made in the BTR.

The story is inspired by Nikolai Gumilev's poem 'Zabludivshiisya tramvai' ('The Tram That Lost Its Way'), two lines of which are quoted at the opening of the story ('Even in broad daylight, [the tram] left behind a trail of fire in the air') (64).[46] In Gumilev's mystical poem, the St. Petersburg tram on which the poet rides suddenly becomes disconnected from normal time and space. During the ensuing journey the poet dreams that he loses his life, then his loved one, and ultimately seeks forgiveness in a religious exculpation of his sins. Segen' provides early intimations of a similar

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[45] Aleksandr Segen', 'Zabludivshiisya BTR', Nash sovremennik 5 (1991): 64-119.

[46] Translation from Nikolai Gumilev, 'The Tram that Lost its Way', The Heritage of Russian Verse, ed. Dmitri Obolensky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976) 300. Perhaps due to a typesetting error, the lines are reversed in the Nash sovremennik edition.

journey in his story when he writes that 'the dust seemed like the gentle residue of a just-forgotten dream' (65). Afghan nights are filled with the terrible magic of flares and silhouettes accompanied by the booming and chattering of weapons, as if the soldiers are on another planet (83-84).

In this spirit of fantasy, the story contains folkloric elements, such as the pronouncement of the enchanted ewer's name, which grants Mityashin magical powers (114), or his flask of vodka, which needs no replenishment (102). After Mityashin enters his dream world, the BTR carries him along much as Makar travels across the other-worldly landscape in Kuprin's nineteenth-century tribute to Siberian folklore, 'Makar's Dream':

> And again they drove and they drove, and the sun burned hot as hot, and the road still stretched without end, without end, and no one knew where they were or where they were going, where the road was, where Mukhamedka was, where our own troops were, or where the spooks were. (100)

Yet this apparently surrealistic 'platoon' story is also anchored in the reality of the contemporary Soviet soldier's world. Mityashin and his men identify with Rambo, the film character, to the point of cheering him on during cinematic battles against Russian troops in Afghanistan (72). Similarly, Mityashin's patron saint is the body-building movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger, whom he invokes in times of danger (86). Segen' aptly portrays international commercialized icons as more powerful than ideology.

The women in the story are neither characters with realistic psychological attributes, nor are they mysterious figures in the distance which serve only to add artificial romance, or to depict the naïvety of a male protagonist. Rather, they seem to serve as symbols of the unexpected and uncontrolled in an environment dominated by warfare. For example, Segen' tells the story of two warrant officers who purchase an Afghan girl from her poverty-stricken uncle. But one of the warrant officers is wounded, the other becomes ill from disease, and both are sent home to the Soviet Union. The girl spurns all other suitors, travels to Kabul and demands the return of her two 'husbands'. The Soviet authorities locate the two men, and ship them back to Afghanistan to face a court-martial (91). Other examples of the reversal of expectations

include the temptress who becomes a Medusa, and who then disappears in a ball of flame (115); and the young wife of the old general who suddenly and tyrannically demands a pet monkey from Jalalabad (88).[47] Moreover, after the joke about Baba Yaga, Petryakov's lover is transformed at the story's end from a fat cook into a pretty mistress of ceremonies, retorting to the surprised call of 'Baba Yaga' with the vindicating punchline of the familiar anecdote: 'To you, perhaps, but to all the other 'shuravi' [Soviets], I'm Vasilisa the Beautiful' (118). Thus are the men continually surprised by a war which upsets their expectations; these reversed expectations in this story seem to be symbolized in part by female characters.

In order to cast the war in a new light, the story flings political barbs at idols previously considered sacred. A soldier points out that Lenin's outstretched arm as constructed on a hometown statue would, like a gorilla's, nearly reach the ground if allowed to relax its pose (92). Moreover, during his dream Al'bert imagines he meets a column of Soviet troops, headed in the opposite direction, who tell him that they are founding a new state for veterans in Afghanistan, because the Soviet Union has disowned them (113). And at the conclusion, Al'bert discovers that the magnificent Afghan palace is in the new USSR, a land of peace and plenty occupying two former Afghan provinces, whereas their former homeland is now torn by dissent and violence. Even Lenin's body had been purchased by the Americans and carted away (117). The characters also comment ironically on their own woeful position, calling themselves 'citizen commandos' and 'free citizens of the Free Spetsnaz' (80-82), while they make plans to open a restaurant specializing in 'limited contingent' cuisine (85). Indeed, the entire story is based on the work of the poet Gumilev, whose memory until recently was reviled as that of an anti-Bolshevik reactionary.

The fact that this story was published in the conservative nationalist journal Nash sovremennik may be another indicator of the gradual accommodation across the

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[47]The general is likened to 'the old man with his old woman in the folktale about the golden fish.' Pushkin's 'Fairytale about the Fisherman and the Fish' may be seen here as a parable for the unexpected and ever-increasing demands of this war on the Soviets.

political spectrum to non-standard fiction about the war. In many ways, however, 'The BTR That Lost Its Way' conforms to the conservative Slavophile philosophy characteristic of Nash sovremennik.[48] Boris Yeltsin is criticized as an opportunistic politician with grandiose ambitions (92). The various ethnic minorities within the former Soviet Union are conventionally portrayed in this 'platoon' story as a feisty yet cooperative team, with the important exception of the Balts, who at the time of this story's publication were the only nationalities to adopt an uncompromising position toward independence. A Kazakh sighs, 'An unreliable people.' (73) And the satiric missiles aimed at singer and songwriter Aleksandr Rozenbaum carry the taint of anti-semitism (113, 117). Yet the depiction of the war in terms of a fantastic hallucination is a radical departure from the previously unadventurous stylistic boundaries adhered to by writers publishing in politically conservative journals. The device of the hero awakening from a dream precludes labelling this story as a sort of Soviet 'magic realism', but the narrative combines political satire, fantasy and documentary realism in a way which has not been seen before in Afghan war fiction. This genre now has a story which, with its dream sequences and satiric content, may be compared stylistically, if not ideologically, to Vladimir Voinovich's The Life and Extraordinary Adventures of Private Ivan Chonkin, the anti-war, anti-Soviet satire set during the outset of the Great Patriotic War.

Nikolai Ivanov continues his own attack on the liberal press, and the journal Ogonek in particular, with his 1991 satirical story 'S vyezdom na mesto' ('Reporting Live From the Front').[49] Battalion commander Sinitsyn is entrusted with the safety of a Moscow journalist named Artur Grib, who seeks a first-hand account of the war from the foot-soldier's point of view. Sinitsyn decides to plant two mujahedin prisoners in a nearby abandoned village, along with a dozen captured rifles which will be buried beforehand. When Grib arrives, Sinitsyn assembles a platoon of cooks and clerks

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[48]For a general discussion of the nationalist editorial policies of Nash sovremennik, see Yitzhak M. Brudny, 'The Heralds of Opposition to Perestroyka', Milestones in Glasnost and Perestoyka, eds. Edward A. Hewett and Victor H. Winston (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1991) 153-89.
[49]Nikolai Ivanov, 'S vyezdom na mesto'.

outfitted in combat gear, and the entire group, including Grib, make an assault on the bogus enemy position after their helicopter flies in circles for an appropriate amount of time. The bewildered prisoners are 'captured' once again, the arms cache 'discovered', and Grib is thrilled with his story, for which he will later be awarded a medal by the cynical Sinitsyn.

This satire is yet another salvo in the on-going battle between the conservative and liberal factions of the glasnost-era Soviet press, in this case fired by Ivanov from the pages of the patriotic almanac Podvig. The character of Artur Grib is a rather heavy-handed attack on Artem Borovik (both surnames mean 'mushroom'), the young radical reporter from the liberal weekly Ogonek (according to Sinitsyn, 'some sort of perestroika-minded newspaper') (182). Grib earns the captain's enmity when he makes the unprecedented request to be allowed to interview any casualties while still in the field, and as noted earlier, Borovik established his reputation by accompanying soldiers on missions.[50] In this instance Ivanov substitutes satire for straightforward declamatory attacks which are voiced by characters in his other stories, such as when one soldier labels Ogonek 'not a journal, but an institute of precocious dilettantes'.[51]

A similar plot, though more serious in mood, may be found in S. Sokolov's 'Tigrovyi kogot" ('The Tiger's Claw'), this time apparently attacking the conservative literary establishment. Senior Lieutenant Egorov must escort a writer through enemy territory so that he may conduct interviews. The pompous writer is at first impatient, then oblivious to time, and dangerously delays the departure of the column on its homeward journey. As night falls they come under attack, and several soldiers are wounded. 'No book is worth a life', thinks the protagonist bitterly (83). This plot device underscores the theme of betrayal felt by the troops toward official writers, who asked soldiers such questions as whether they thought about duty and country when

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[50]The enmity between Molodaya gvardiya publishing house and the journal Ogonek is described by Brudny 171. S. Ionin refers to an actual similar incident involving an unnamed reporter in Sergei Ionin, 'Poiskakh geroya' 142.
[51]Ivanov, 'Kombat Egorychev', '"Al'kor"' 118. See also a brief criticism of the press in 'Den' za tri' 41-42.

under fire (78). Thus an apparently conservative author seems to direct his criticism at a regime which committed a crime worse than overt political repression. Instead, says Sokolov, the state has betrayed its natural constituency through lies in the press.

Humorous satire also comes from the liberal camp, such as Eduard Pustynin's story 'Afganets', published in the journal Znamya.[52] Pustynin, born in 1965, is a veteran of the war who studied at Kuban State University and has worked at a variety of jobs including stevedore, janitor, and vocational institute instructor (103). His first short prose work about the conflict is subtitled 'a novel in 35 chapters', and it has evident autobiographical roots (for example, the narrator studies at Kuban State University). These short 'chapters' form a plotless first-person compilation of wry observations about people and events which the narrator encountered during his tour of duty in Afghanistan, in which pithy humour is found not only in the text but in explanatory footnotes as well.

Pustynin's narrator is a docile non-combatant conscript who unsuccessfully attempts to portray himself as a hero. He suffers anguish from having spread the story that he fought as a paratrooper, even though he actually served as a telephone operator (103). Pustynin's war is one in which the battalion commander raises rabbits, and instead of weapons training, his unit receives lectures on the dangers of masturbation (111). Chapters 14 and 25 entitled 'Spooks' and 'BTRs' refer not to the 'mujahedin' or to 'BTR armoured personnel transports', but to the alternative connotations of 'junior troops' and 'lice' respectively (106, 111). Casualties are absurd events: a 'granddad' steps on a mine while emptying a dustbin, while another simply disappears in an explosion after sending the protagonist for soap (109). The hero is afraid of peeling potatoes (109), cannot seem to learn the art of trading on the black market (114), and is rejected in his attempt to join the KGB contingent or find work on the hospital ward (110). He observes wistfully, 'I loved to fall ill' (108). He does enjoy the privileges of being a 'granddad' during his second year, however, and invests all of

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[52]Pustynin, 'Afganets'.

his effort in convincing the lieutenant that dedovshchina is a good thing (112). As a non-combatant, the author describes a little-publicized aspect of soldiering in Afghanistan which nonetheless informed reality for the vast majority who served there.

Pustynin also seems to make fun of the anti-alcohol campaign waged by Slavophile nationalists in general, and sponsored in the late 1980s by Nash sovremennik in particular.[53] Pressing the fight against the conservatives, the narrator quotes one of his own journal entries in a satiric example of naïvety:

> What personal stand should I take in the battle against drunkenness, and smoking, and drug abuse? ... Would the introduction of prohibition be possible? Will mankind mature? If not, then what awaits us in the future, for example, under communism? (111)

This polemic constitutes a continuing battle in the press between conservatives and revisionists over control of the war's interpretation.

Sergei Dyshev's 'Kapitan Gorelyi' ('Captain Gorely') also uses light humour, though not political satire, to recount the adventures of a sapper platoon as seen through the eyes of Senior Lieutenant Lysov, platoon commander and subordinate of the eponymous hero.[54] The story opens with a surreptitious birthday party held in the women's barracks for an agitprop worker named Vika, then details a mission to supply a local village. The ultimately successful journey is hampered by mines, ambushes, and an Afghan spy who kidnaps one of the women. Captain Gorely rescues her, disarms the spy, removes a mine to save the peasants' fields from intentional flooding, and ends up marrying Vika after recovering from injuries incurred in an explosion.

If the gratuitous combat action is eliminated, Dyshev's depiction of Gorely resembles Bestuzhev-Marlinsky's early nineteenth-century barracks romances updated to the modern era. Gorely illegally enters the women's dormitory only through the door, because 'Guards officers do not crawl through windows' (145). He greets Vika, whose eighteenth birthday they are celebrating, with a gallant brush of her cheek with his grey moustaches. After tea and dancing to the gentle strains of Tanya's Sharp tape

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[53]See Brudny 165, for an account of the anti-alcohol campaign spearheaded by Nash sovremennik.
[54]S. Dyshev, 'Kapitan Gorelyi'.

recorder, the officers depart. They do not fear the guard this time, and no longer have need of Tanya's diversionary tactics as they did earlier, for while it is of course illegal to enter the women's barracks, the regulations are silent on the matter of departure (148). And the brief epilogue neatly doles out destinies appropriate to each character: Vika marries Gorely, Tanya weds another soldier after first contriving his divorce, and Lysov the narrator, after losing his teeth in a mine explosion, considers trying to find the female radio operator in Kiev whose voice once charmed him (180). Thanks to Dyshev's use of an ironic first-person commentator, this story attempts to add levity to the otherwise predominant seriousness found in the majority of Afghan war stories.

As a final addition to the genres already discussed, Nikolai Ivanov's Ogranichennyi kontingent (Limited Contingent) combines historical investigation, dramatized documentary, and fiction in his 'novel-chronicle' (roman-khronika).[55] History is contained in sections labelled 'Required Afterwords', which provide an historical account (without sources in the journal version) of events leading up to the introduction of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. The dramatized documentary purports to give a fly-on-the-wall view of confidential meetings, such as the 8 December 1979 cabinet meeting during which the decision to intervene allegedly was taken. Historical personae are not fully transformed into characters, but Ivanov does present them as sentient, doubting humans who have a private life. The last ingredients in Ivanov's creation are several Russian fictional characters who are caught up in the sweep of history as the Soviet leaders plan their invasion. Thus the work is a mix of formats similar to the interweaving of history and reportage found in Verstakov's Afghan Diary, with novelistic elements combining historical and fictional characters both grand and small. The most interesting aspects of Ivanov's 'novel-chronicle', however, are the historical asides. For example, he quotes a 1979 study conducted by the Academy of Sciences which recommends against the commitment of troops to Afghanistan; and he dramatizes the way the invasion came as a complete surprise to many government

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[55]Nikolai Ivanov, 'Ogranichennyi kontingent', Sovetskii voin 10 (1991): 13-21; 11 (1991): 21-29; 12 (1991) (issue not obtained); 13 - 19/20 (1991): 12-21.

officials, such as Oleg Troyanovsky, the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations (10: 13-14; 18: 18).

Indeed, documentation of details is usually lacking in the so-called 'documentary tales' which serve as literary propaganda. Most of Svetikov's writing, for example, is non-specific and could easily describe a number of twentieth-century wars or armies. Vozovikov's narrative about helicopters does little better, but is punctuated with well-documented problems faced by military pilots in Afghanistan, such as recognition of mobile camouflaged targets of opportunity.[56] According to Vozovikov, the mujahedin were no less willing to adopt new practices. Upon hearing the motor of a search aircraft, they were known to reverse quickly the direction of their caravans in order to deceive spotters looking for an enemy headed in a particular direction (163-64).

As opposed to this general lack of specificity in early works, later authors devote more attention to physical and cultural surroundings. The result is that fictional stories often serve as richer veins of documentation than early non-fiction publitsistika. For example, Nikolai Ivanov sets his scenes with casks of potable water with white cloth covers standing in module corridors, and he dresses the troops with 'brassières', self-made soldiers' t-shirts with pockets sewn in front and back for cartridges and grenades. He also describes particular customs such as observation of 'admiralty hour' in the modules, a traditionally quiet afternoon period after mid-day break.[57] Sergei Dyshev notes that 'Hussar's moustaches' were popular among the troops, said elsewhere to be worn in imitation of the Afghans.[58] And Aleksandr Segen' describes in detail the diet of the Soviet soldier in Afghanistan. Along with oatmeal, tins of fish, sour apple compote, and rancid tea, was served pilaf: 'rice steamed to a thin gruel, sprinkled with bits of bone, in which meat might occasionally be sighted.' But as was not the case with Ivan Denisovich's labour camp diet, the troops were free to invent

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[56] Vozovikov 95, 131.
[57] Ivanov, 'Kombat Egorychev' 99-100.
[58] S. Dyshev, 'Pulya na ladoni' 44.

variations: hard tack soaked for several hours in a bucket of water, fried in oil and dipped in condensed milk, provides a passable substitute for Russian pancakes, while baked hard tack with scavenged pieces of onion and meat make a sort of shashlik.[59] The comparative joys of dry rations taken into the field are also enumerated:

> ... stew, liver pâté, butter, hard tack, condensed milk, grape juice, and all of these things in such tidy little tins, which are so nice to empty, and enough tea to satisfy everyone. And potatoes, with tomato sauce, fried on a griddle. (72)

Additionally, facts are provided about the tactical conduct of the war itself. For example, according to Ivanov, the Afghan conflict was the first to witness the use of Soviet air force navigators as forward air controllers serving with army units to direct air strikes against ground targets.[60] And Dyshev documents the extensive logistical infrastructure which the mujahedin built up in certain areas, complete with a supply and transport system, central headquarters, printing presses for propaganda, soldiers' barracks, prisons, observation points, and road checkpoints which issued passes.[61]

In recent stories, writers have taken advantage of the removal of censorship to document negative phenomena as well. Sergei Dyshev observes that soldiers avoided combat duty by shooting off fingers or toes, and that contraband vodka was shipped in fuel barrels, which is why vodka in Afghanistan notoriously tasted of petrol.[62] Pustynin notes that drivers and vehicle inspectors were inveterate black marketeers, and that junior troops and those suspected of being stool-pigeons were not allowed by the other troops to use illegal drugs.[63] In fact, it is in recent stories which claim only to be imaginative reconstructions that there is the greatest correspondence to the documentation of publitsistika. Thus, the detail to be found in recent fiction serves not only the aesthetic aim of verisimilitude, but also provides a treasure-house of facts about the soldier's daily life.

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[59]Segen', 'Zabludivshiisya BTR' 85.
[60]Ivanov, 'Kombat Egorychev' 134-35.
[61]S. Dyshev, 'Pulya na ladoni' 53.
[62]S. Dyshev, 'Da vozdastsya' 3, 5.
[63]Pustynin, 'Afganets' 114, 110.

Afghan war literature has assumed varied shapes in the first decade of its existence. Propaganda may vary from the plotless hagiographies of Svetikov and Dmitrenko, to the political novels of the Topols and Kim Selikhov, but they have in common reliable narrators, heroic protagonists, and unambiguous villains. In the case of documentary propaganda, simple narrative progression is interspliced with a history of the hero's military training, first love, and political events in Afghanistan, none of which possess any causal relationship to the main events of the story. Veiled allusions to problems in the army may be made only in positive terms. In an oblique reference to harrassment, for example, Yury Teplov explains that soldiers secretly use the affectionate name 'Uncle Leshka' for Warrant Officer Sorokopul because he does not 'stand on formulas and regulations'.[64] Serious problems with ideological implications, such as racial discrimination, simply do not exist. Instead, heroism is emphasized, and Soviet authors use World War Two as a metaphor for valour. These writers unconditionally support the invasion while apportioning blame for the 'undeclared war' among western states; in fact, foreign artefacts are a predictable represention of evil. Emigre writers, of course, propose the reverse axiom. Since actual strategic superiority was never achieved, Soviet propagandists symbolize victory with the achievement of more modest tactical goals, such as the seizure of high ground in mountain warfare, and the capture of trophies of war. Stylistically, the formal strictures of socialist realism show remarkable vigour, demonstrated by the 1990 publications of Vozovikov's 'Pomegranate Blossom' and Dmitrenko's AIST. Whether this form of expression will be able to compete in future against the efforts of a younger generation, however, is doubtful. Even conservative literary critics have expressed the need for a thorough re-evaluation of officially approved war fiction.[65]

Instead, military publications are now sanctioning works by their own uniformed writers which reflect the breakdown of consensus concerning earlier sacred

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[64]Teplov, 'Granatovyi svet' 292.
[65]For example, see Ivan Pankeev, '"Ustalaya" literatura', Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil 16 (1989): 88-92.

truths about the war. Relative iconoclasts such as Andrei Dyshev and Nikolai Ivanov publishing in Sovetskii voin may now incorporate into their 'platoon' stories discussions of social pathologies such as nepotism, bribery, nationalism, and disaffection with military duty among the younger generation. World War Two either disappears as a controlling metaphor, or is used to show the Afghan War in a relatively positive light, as in Gorbachev's sympathetic reception of repatriated Soviet prisoners of war as compared to the hostile greeting extended by Stalin. Sergei Dyshev's 'The Replacement', for another example, portrays one soldier as a 'Vasya Terkin of the 80s', in tribute to the wry, populist hero of Tvardovsky's famous poem instead of other more heroic role models of World War Two.[66] Moreover, the few early instances of optimistic conclusions such as that attempted by Selikhov are replaced by a less sanguine concentration on themes which include overcoming physical exhaustion, injury, and mental strain, such as the exhausting climb into the mountains in search of the Soviet civilians in Dyshev's 'A Bullet in the Palm'. The theme of tactical military victory is replaced by personal goals of individual victory over the elements, or victory over self, and fidelity to compatriots. Even this concession is superseded in turn by themes which delineate futility, loss, and disillusionment. In this vein, the first wave of amateur writers has used first-person narrators to explore the world of the returning -- and often disabled -- veteran. It must be noted, however, that these officially approved military writers have not experimented with form or style to any significant degree. Ivanov's stories, for example, have much action but little plot, with romantic triangles rather clumsily attached to the main narrative line. Neither he, nor Andrei Dyshev, nor any of the others experiment with prose style, and most fail to heed Henry James' dictum concerning the basic requisite of fiction: the ability to sustain interest.

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[66] A. Dyshev, 'Zamena' 23.

Several new individual voices, however, transcend ideology and point the way toward previously unexploited styles while providing a world rich in detail. Sergei Dyshev speaks powerfully in soldiers' language of their bitterness over futile tactics in an unwinnable civil war. Aleksandr Segen' has proved to be adept at depicting a disaffected older generation who are confronted with their sons' suffering. He also has been the first to employ fantasy and dream imagery as the basis for plot with his satiric 'The BTR That Lost Its Way'. Indeed, the introduction of humour and satire marks a new stage of development for Afghan literature, as writers are increasingly able to distance themselves from ideological warfare. Eduard Pustynin is an example of an author who employs wry humour in his depiction of the non-combatants in Afghanistan. His narrator views the war as a temporary stopover on a confusing journey toward maturity, with no worthwhile goals to be found either in Afghanistan or at home. It must be added that although the dominant tone of the latter two satiric works is not ideological, they nevertheless reflect the contemporary political contest between liberals and conservatives, which was being fought daily in the pages of the leading journals. In this case, their battle over the interpretation and aesthetic treatment of the Afghan War provides insight into the larger political debate which is shaping the future of their country.

Chapter Six

The Afghan War Fiction of Aleksandr Prokhanov

This chapter discusses the works of Aleksandr Prokhanov, the most prolific author of Afghan War fiction to date. He has written two novels and at least twelve short stories and novellas, not including numerous dispatches from combat zones. His officially sanctioned works span the entire decade of the war, thus providing a guide to the evolving Party viewpoint. After a brief biography and review of criticism, the evolution of his novels and stories will be discussed with respect to glasnost. Tretii tost (The Third Toast), a collected edition of Prokhanov's Afghan fiction, will be used as the definitive text for all of Prokhanov's short stories and novellas which it contains, and which may have appeared earlier in journals; in at least three cases, the journal editions have been condensed.[1]

Aleksandr Prokhanov was born in Tbilisi in 1938. He studied aeronautical engineering at the Moscow Aviation Institute, and worked briefly at an engineering institute before devoting himself to writing. While working as a forester for two years, he turned to his new vocation and published his first short story in 1963. He then became a correspondent for Literaturnaya gazeta. During the next two decades he was to travel extensively, writing two collections of short stories and four novels which portrayed the Party's fight for economic and social progress within the Soviet Union. By 1986, he had completed three novels, which praised Soviet military involvement in Kampuchea, Mozambique, and Nicaragua, along with two novels about Afghanistan

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[1]Prokhanov, Tretii tost. The concluding six paragraphs of 'Domoi!' starting from 'Potom on ne prikhodil...' (Tretii tost 543) are missing in the version printed in Pogranichnik 2 (1991): 35; three paragraphs of 'Troe v BTR' including 'V Yablochnyi spas...'; 'V Velikii post...'; and 'Paskha...' (Tretii tost 314-15) are missing from the English translation 'Three Men in an APC', Soviet Soldier 1 (1990): 15; and one paragraph of 'Rodnen'kii' starting from 'Smotrel, kak bezhit...' (Tretii tost 126-27) is missing in the version published in Moskva. The journal versions appear to have been edited for brevity rather than censored for controversial material.

based on his experiences as a war correspondent for Literaturnaya gazeta.[2] In the mid-eighties Prokhanov reached the zenith of his literary prominence. He became a secretary of the RSFSR Writers' Union in 1985, and in the following year he served as a delegate to the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress. Already a laureate of the Lenin Komsomol Prize, he was nominated for the 1986 USSR State Prize for Literature in the 'literary-publicistic' (khudozhestvennaya publitsistika) category.[3]

Prokhanov's influence within the official literary hierarchy subsequently waned, tied as it was to the failing prospects of the Party and the military. After Literaturnaya gazeta became independent from the Union of Writers in early 1991, Prokhanov broke his ties with that publication to become editor of Den'. This newly-created patriotic newspaper enjoyed the sponsorship of both the Union of Writers and the Ministry of Defence. He gained notoriety in July 1991 by co-signing the nationalist manifesto 'An Address to the People', which called for unity in the face of national disintegration, and decried the forfeiture of material wealth, and loss of traditional spiritual values.[4] The signatories equated Gorbachev's programme of perestroika with surrender to alien and corrupt western powers. Critics would see this as a nationalist incitement of the subsequent coup attempt in August. Shortly after the putsch failed, he and other conservatives such as Yury Bondarev were ousted from their executive offices in the Union of Writers by a liberal revolt from within the ranks led by Evgeny Evtushenko.[5] As of the beginning of 1992, Prokhanov continues as editor of Den'. Although his newspaper lost the official sponsorship of the Union of Writers immediately after the coup attempt, it remained under the patronage of the Ministry of

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[2]N. N. Shneidman, Soviet Literature in the 1980s (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1989) 142-43. Also Yurenen, 'The Vulnerability of Armour'; and Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Nashe vremya goryachee', interview with Vyacheslav Ogryzko, Krasnaya zvezda 6 March 1987: 4.

[3]Yurenen, 'Vulnerability' 1; Shneidman 229n.

[4]'Slova k narodu', Sovetskaya Rossiya 23 July 1991: 1. The appeal was signed by twelve conservative leaders, including authors Yury Bondarev and Valentin Rasputin, and generals Valentin Varennikov and Boris Gromov.

[5]Irina Rishina and Marina Kudimova, 'Oboidemsya bez raskola?' Literaturnaya gazeta 28 Aug. 1991: 9.

Defence.[6] Currently Prokhanov is working on an historical chronicle of the Afghan conflict entitled Dvorets (The Palace).[7]

Early reviews of Prokhanov's works were positive. Yury Trifonov wrote the foreword to Prokhanov's 1971 collection of short stories Idu v put' moi (I Set Out On My Way), and he classified the young author as a promising exponent of the 'village prose' school. But Prokhanov's story topics quickly changed from rural to urban industrialized settings. Sergei Yurenin notes that Prokhanov gave up any pretence of writing 'village prose', and instead pursued the politically favoured course of documenting Soviet industrial and military might. In Yurenin's opinion, Prokhanov was reviving the pre-World War Two 'defence' genre, which, with Stalin's approval, was current from the mid-1930s until the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop non-aggression pact in 1939. This genre was originally christened by Maxim Gorky in a letter praising the 1934-36 novel by P. Pavlenko Na vostoke (In the East). Another example of this genre cited by Yurenin is the 1939 novel by N. Shpanov called Pervyi udar (First Strike). Both books predict war (Pavlenko looking east, Shpanov forecasting war with Germany) in which the Soviets achieve rapid victory after sustaining an unprovoked attack.[8] This category refers to Prokhanov's early Afghan War fiction, in which the author seems to predict a global political and military crisis.

An alternative classification of Prokhanov's works was offered by Mikhail Geller, the eminent emigre writer, who labelled 'A Tree in the Centre of Kabul' a contemporary manifestation of the Soviet colonial novel, in the tradition of Bruno Yasensky's Chelovek menyaet kozhu (A Man Changes His Skin) and Boris Pil'nyak's Tadzhikistan, sed'maya sovetskaya (Tadjikistan, The Seventh Soviet).[9] Geller heavily criticizes Prokhanov's books as tools used by the Soviet government to explain

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[6]Sergei Kiselev, '"Den' zakryt, vse ushli na putch"', Literaturnaya gazeta 28 Aug. 1991: 3.
[7]Aleksandr Prokhanov, personal interview, Moscow, 1 Oct. 1991.
[8]For a discussion of the 'defence genre', see: Sergei Yurenen, 'The Defence Genre: The Literature of Tomorrow?' Radio Liberty Research Bulletin 81/85 (15 March 1985): 2 ; reference to Prokhanov's Idu v put' moi, p. 3.
[9]Mikhail Geller, 'Sovetskii kolonial'nyi roman', Obozrenie 6 (1983): 26.

continued privations to its citizens. For this reason, Geller calls Prokhanov's first book about Afghanistan a 'symbolic novel', showing the Soviet people the reasons for their material sacrifices.[10] Indeed, he listed only one benefit from reading Prokhanov: in his opinion, bad Soviet literature was more valuable than good Soviet literature, because the former at least shed light on Soviet political intentions. In this sense, Prokhanov was being used by the Party as a willing partner in the state's ideological war with the West.

For precisely these reasons, Prokhanov's fiction on Afghanistan drew initial praise in the Soviet press. Georgy Viren said that Prokhanov's 'front-line prose' came from a distinguished lineage dating from the 'pre-war literature of the 1930s'. Prokhanov himself called his four novels of the early 1980s 'geopolitical or military-political works', as well as 'war chronicles', 'novel probes', and 'novel reportage'.[11] These names emphasize Prokhanov's fascination with war as well as politics, and his journalistic background. Perhaps the most useful general appellation is the 'political novel', defined by the Soviet critic V. Oskotsky as

> a novel of ideas, in which the dynamic of the plot is formed by open conflict between political forces, and takes place in the international arena, pitting various social systems and types of social consciousness against one another.[12]

Viren also used this classification when referring to Prokhanov, and called him the herald of a new era of confrontation between East and West in which military power would play a major role. In the Soviet context, the term 'political novel' encompasses the 'defence genre', and incorporates the fascination with battle that dominates his prose.

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[10]Geller 27.

[11]Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Formuly, gipotezy', Literaturnaya gazeta 6 Nov. 1985: 6.

[12]V. Oskotsky, 'Politicheskii roman, 80-e...', Literaturnoe obozrenie 3 (1985): 4. This review also discusses (3) other 'anti-fascist political novels' of the 1930s: Konstantin Fedin's Pokhishchenie Evropy, and Sanatorii Arktur; Nikolai Ostrovsky's Rozhdennye burei; and B. Yasensky's Zagovor ravnodushnykh. More recent practitioners of the political genre in Oskotsky's estimation include Aleksandr Chakovsky, Blokada, written between 1968 and 1973; M. Sturua, 'Vid na Vashington iz otelya "Uotergeit"', Zvezda 7 (1982): 5-86; and B. Gribanov, 'Pulya dlya presidenta', Znamya 6 (1982): 78-156.

But Viren's article listed several other labels for Prokhanov's genre: 'socio-psychological drama', 'a psychological tale with an international theme', and another, of the author's own choice, the 'novel-confession'.[13] These three characterizations emphasize another aspect of Prokhanov's novels: the depiction of the protagonist's personal crisis within the broader political context. Prokhanov emphasized precisely this characteristic when he labelled his earlier Afghan war fiction as 'romantic', without any reference to politics. In fact, he stated that the inspiration he uses for his Afghan War fiction is Tolstoy's Sevastopol Stories, indicating an intended theme to his writing which is personal, psychological, and lyrical, rather than purely political.[14] Thus, one strand of critical interpretation emphasizes Prokhanov's ideology, the other his psychology. His fiction is the expression of a writer who was trained as an engineer, yet who seems more fascinated with the effect of technology on the human psyche than with its effect on the outer human environment.

Negative criticism of Prokhanov in the official press began as early as the mid-1980s. The critic L. Fink took Prokhanov to task for 'compositional fragmentation, lack of episodic continuity, and an abundance of second-rate characters who are not fully realized'.[15] Even on political aspects, V. Oskotsky criticized the author's failure to document the complex internal politics of Afghanistan.[16] Pavel Basinsky's article 'The Prokhanov Phenomenon' discusses the writer's political activism as much as his fiction.[17] Basinsky finds Prokhanov's literary talent not unpraiseworthy; contrary to the opinion of most critics, he thinks that 'there are many masterfully drawn characters and situations' in the Afghan War novel 'A Tree in the Centre of Kabul'. But he concludes that Prokhanov's fiction suffers from an incoherent mix of unfocused and sometimes contradictory beliefs, such as Communism and Orthodoxy, and that his protagonists appear as projections of the author's own ego. In the works discussed

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[13]Georgy Viren, 'Imya dlya vremeni', Literaturnaya gazeta 26 Dec. 1984: 4.
[14]Prokhanov, personal interview.
[15]L. Fink, 'Esli sudit' po vysshemu schetu', Literaturnaya gazeta 10 Sept. 1986: 7.
[16]Oskotsky 6.
[17]Pavel Basinsky, 'Sluchai Prokhanov', Literaturnaya gazeta 12 Feb. 1992: 4.

below, we shall see how this is true initially, and yet how the protagonists in the later war stories begin to exist independently of their creator.

Besides the ideological overtones of his books, perhaps it is his conservative, nationalist political activism which colours Soviet criticism of Prokhanov's literary output. Alla Latynina, the literary critic, dampened her faint praise for Prokhanov's change of mind about the war by repeating a nickname which would follow the author ever after:

> ... even Prokhanov, the nightingale of the General Staff, accustomed to looking down at the big picture from a military helicopter and presenting human beings as dots on a geopolitical map, -- even he, it seems, after hymns to Aries, has come down to the blood-covered ground to distinguish the grimace of suffering and death which a real person suffers for the sake of abstract ideas.[18]

Perhaps this negative critical reception prevailed among the lower-ranking military readership as well. Dmitri Ol'shansky states that 'not in Moscow and certainly not by literary critics was he (Prokhanov) called the "nightingale of the General Staff". I first heard that nickname from officers in Pakhtia Province.'[19] Thus, by 1988, only General A. D. Lizichev, Chief of the Main Political Administration, could find kind words for Prokhanov. The general praised him as a writer who was capable of creating positive heroes out of contemporary soldiers serving 'beyond the borders of our Motherland'.[20] It is Prokhanov's early willingness to accept and translate the dictates of political authorities into his fiction that dooms him, in the eyes of his critics, to being perpetually behind the times, despite having published during the first years of the Afghan War.

Prokhanov's Afghan War fiction may be divided into two periods. The first period, lasting from 1979 through 1988 and corresponding to the time of Soviet occupation, includes the two novels 'Derevo v tsentre Kabula' ('A Tree in the Centre of Kabul') and 'Risunki batalista' ('Sketches of a Battlefield Artist'), and the novella

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[18]A. Latynina, 'Kolokol'nyi zvon -- ne molitva', Novyi mir 8 (1988): 243.

[19]D. Ol'shansky, '"Afganskii sindrom"' 14.

[20]A. D. Lizichev, 'Sotsialisticheskaya armiya i literatura' 175.

'Brighter Than Sky-Blue'. The author evidently was concerned with what he felt to be the intensifying struggle between international socialism and imperialism, and his works predict the cataclysmic collision of these two forces.

Prokhanov's first novel focuses on civil unrest in the Afghan capital shortly after the invasion of December 1979.[21] The story opens at the Soviet-Afghan border, where Ivan Volkov, a Soviet journalist, and Said Ismail, an Afghan Communist Party (PDPA) activist, watch a cheering crowd of Russians and Soviet Uzbeks bid farewell to a convoy of tractors heading south as part of an aid package to the fledgling revolutionary government of Afghanistan. Travelling independently to Kabul, Volkov encounters various characters representing different sides of the conflict. He attends a press conference for Babrak Karmal, meets Andre Vin'yar, a reporter from Le Monde, and later listens to Said Ismail debate party policy towards the counter-revolutionaries who threaten the city. Volkov then meets several Russians who will play a role in the hero's personal life: secretary Marina Voronina, with whom he becomes romantically involved, and historian Belousov, a former comrade whom he now disparages for lack of interest in contemporary political issues. After a journey to Jalalabad where he interviews enemy prisoners and watches the destruction of an enemy caravan, Volkov returns to the capital to witness an insurrection by mujahedin guerrillas. In a successful counterattack, students, women, and soldiers take up arms to search the Old Town for the mujahedin underground headquarters where bombs are made. By the end of the novel, Said Ismail has persuaded the mullahs in Herat to forego a holy war against the Soviet-backed government, and the tractors arrive safely at their rural destination under the gaze of Volkov and Voronina.

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[21] Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Derevo v tsentre Kabula', Oktyabr' 1 (1982): 3-73; 2 (1982): 74-137. Subsequent references will use edition and page number in the text. For an account of the general strike on 21 February 1980 against the newly imposed Karmal regime, and subsequent strikes, demonstrations and riots in April and May 1980, see Urban 60-61; and Prokhanov, 'Kabul: kontrrevolyutsiya ne proshla'.

Prokhanov's second Afghan War novel is set in Herat, a city which changed hands several times in 1986.[22] The painter Veretenov volunteers for duty in Afghanistan as a war artist in order to find his estranged son. After arriving in Herat, where his son is stationed, the father confesses to the boy that he has neglected him for his career. From the Soviet headquarters overlooking the city, Veretenov observes the liberation of Herat and even clumsily carries an automatic rifle during the last battle. The novel concludes on a patriotic note with a celebration for the troops, including his son, given by the city inhabitants.

The main plot of 'Battlefield Artist' is punctuated with six fictional character portraits, each based on a drawing sketched by the artist as he travels around Afghanistan. These digressions, comprising over one third of the text, remove the protagonist Veretenov entirely from the narrative and may perhaps stand alone as independent short stories. In 'The Grey-Haired Soldier' (9: 44-71) Private Nikolai Morozov is a former university student who is captured by the enemy and forced to watch as a fellow prisoner is executed.[23] Also present is an English reporter for Reuters named Staff, who derives sadistic pleasure in photographing the executions, and who tries to convince Morozov to defect to the West. Morozov manages to escape his captors by braving a minefield, but his hair is now grey from his brush with death. 'Two Men on a Mountain Highway' (9: 83-90) describes the heroism of two soldiers, one an experienced veteran and the other his new replacement, as their lorry convoy comes under attack. The fledgling driver saves his wounded partner and manages to navigate the damaged vehicle off the road so that the convoy is not halted. Only after being rescued does he break down from the ordeal.[24] The third story describes a soldier's return home on leave; 'The River' (9: 145-55) combines nostalgia and mysticism as Anton Stepushkin greets his young sweetheart and is welcomed by villagers. He is invited to visit the chairman of the local soviet -- a World War Two

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[22]Prokhanov, 'Risunki batalista'. Subsequent references will use edition and page number in the text. For an account of the battle for Herat, see Urban 188-89.
[23]'Sedoi soldat' was initially published in advance of the novel in Znamya 2 (1985): 116-56.
[24]'Dvoe na gornoi doroge' also appears in Tretii tost 489-500.

veteran -- to talk about his experiences in the Afghan conflict (9: 147). Anton's service in Afghanistan thus grants him equality with front-line soldiers from the Great Patriotic War, and when he swims across the local river for the first time, he experiences a mystical unity with his native land (9: 151). The fourth story, 'A Combat Girlfriend' (10: 23-33) is about Tanya, the librarian at an army post in Afghanistan. She falls in love with the widowed commander, who frequents the library to find books beloved by his deceased wife. In the denouement, Tanya decides she will marry him (10: 32-33). In the penultimate character sketch, 'The Goblet' (10: 46-62), Prokhanov focuses on Sergeant Teren'tev, who suddenly becomes frightened of combat missions as the date for his demobilization approaches. Rather than punish him, the commander cures Teren'tev's timidity by permitting him to stay behind, thus making him realize his importance to the squad. The final story 'My Commander' (10: 73-85) describes an officer's trip back to the Soviet Union, during which he has the opportunity for a brief rendezvous with his patiently waiting wife. He notes the contrast between peaceful Russia and war-torn Afghanistan, and also observes how those who care little about the war also take for granted the benefits of peace.

The last of Prokhanov's works in this first period is the 1986 novella 'Brighter Than Sky-Blue' which focuses on the efforts of Soviet troops to protect convoys passing along the Salang Highway (179-276).[25] The story is told from the perspective of Major Glushkov, who has responsibility for securing the mountain pass. Glushkov's travails -- the intransigence of bureaucratic superior officers, morale problems among the soldiers, and finally an enemy attack -- are described as they are encountered while three convoys are shepherded to safety. At the story's conclusion, the major survives a fiery accident reminiscent of a similar brush with death which his father experienced in the Great Patriotic War. Like his father, Glushkov returns to a

[25]Page numbers for this and all succeeding works by Prokhanov cited in this chapter, except for the novels previously discussed, refer to Tretii tost.

burning vehicle to retrieve some maps, and exhibits valour in a circumstance which does not demand it.[26]

In these works, Prokhanov presents the conflict between socialism and western imperialism through both narrative technique and topical reference. Explicit interpretive statements are voiced by an omniscient third-person narrator: 'Dark, superhuman forces are at work.... These forces are shifting continents, mining the earth, preparing a universal catastrophe!...' ('Battlefield Artist' 9: 115). Likewise, in 'Sky-Blue', the third-person narrative voice labels Akhmad Shakh (Masud) as an enemy: 'perfidious and cunning, a friend of America, a rich man and a politician, he had declared war on Kabul' (222). The Salang Highway is described in equally unambiguous terms: 'This road connected two neighbouring friendly countries' (198). References to topical political issues include the conflict of Soviet, Iranian, and American interests in the Persian Gulf, which is tied to an immediate threat to the homeland: '... in the Persian Gulf the aircraft carrier America is sailing, with jets rising from her deck, ready to fly across the Urals to replace home towns with radioactive craters' ('Battlefield Artist', 10: 56). The abstract ideological conflict is thus rendered in concrete terms.

Besides authoritative statements by an omniscient narrator, Prokhanov also uses transparent symbolism to depict the two sides arrayed in battle. In 'Tree (in the Centre of Kabul)', Soviet Uzbeks display wounds sustained supporting Bolshevik power during the Basmach rebellion, and wear medals earned in the Great Patriotic War ('Tree' 1: 3). Thus Afghan ethnic groups may presumably model themselves on their Soviet brethren who have adopted communism. Likewise, Russian surgeons perform a medical operation to remove shrapnel from a boy's heart, which mirrors the military operation to search the Old Town for an enemy underground headquarters (2: 92). In contrast, anti-Soviet powers are motivated by age-old imperialist aspirations toward Afghanistan. In contrast to Russian archeologists, who restore the past with no ulterior motive, an anecdote is related about English archeologists in the 1920s who explored

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[26]Both the protagonist and the map-retrieval incident are based on facts initially recounted by the author in his article 'Zapiski na brone'.

for caravanserais of antiquity -- but only in order to ascertain optimum tank routes into India and Central Asia (1: 17). Prokhanov's symbolism is always unambiguous, and leaves little room for variant interpretations.

Characterization is subordinated to the same ideological purpose. In 'Tree', Babrak Karmal is shown only during a press conference to enhance the portrait of a determined socialist leader rather than a man with human qualities, while French reporter Vin'yar personifies the Western propaganda machine by verbally harassing the protagonist (1: 6-8). Villains are stereotyped: for example, a mujahed prisoner is called a 'feudal slave' (1: 53). Several dialogues in the novel have no other purpose than to distill political debate: over the use of violence in revolution (1: 12-16), or about Marxism and religion (1: 54). Only once is Marina's temporarily dispiriting voice heard: 'Could it really be that all of our efforts, all of our hopes -- are all for nought?' (2: 102) But this speech primarily portrays empathy with innocently suffering Afghans; Volkov realizes he is in love with her as a result of her sentiment (2: 103). Thus the novel's message of political support to the Afghan revolutionaries, delivered by means of characterization, remains undiluted.

Related to characterization is the value within Prokhanov's early works that is attributed to courage gained in battle. He presents combat as such a critical experience for men that maturity and meaningful relationships are impossible without it. In 'Battlefield Artist', it is implied that Veretenev's marriage had ended in divorce because of lack of hardship (9: 36). And because the son has endured the experience of combat, he is now responsible for teaching his father:

How many skills had he, the father, passed on to [the son] in the past! How to sharpen a pencil. Squeeze toothpaste out of a tube. Hold a spoon during dinner. Now his son was teaching him -- teaching him the skill of using a weapon. And he, the father, obediently took a lesson from his son (10: 87).

Furthermore, the independent stories within the novel reinforce the point; in 'My Commander', for example, the military family forms the spiritual bedrock of the country, while an ignorant public, which fails to comprehend the extent of the foreign threat, reaps the benefits of peace without appreciation. As in 'Battlefield Artist',

conflict in 'Sky-Blue' is also resolved by the demands of combat. Glushkov and his artillery commander do not like each other, but they resolve their personal differences when it comes to battle (198). An inexperienced lieutenant (213) now walks proudly after his baptism of fire (267); a depressed officer (225) becomes an inspired leader in combat (260). Even a Moscow military inspector with niggling criticisms (234-35) eventually comes to recognize the competence of the fighting troops (248).

Prokhanov also exhibits party-mindedness, typified by a reference to Lenin in 'Tree' (2: 100). The conclusion to that novel also reinforces the traditional Party ideological framework (ideinost') of the novel. Set in the context of agricultural lands under irrigation, the scene involves a mechanic and a soldier, so that classic representatives of each stratum of Soviet society are present. In time to the blows of a blacksmith's hammer, Said Ismail denounces imperialism and banditry, and eulogizes land distribution and cultivation (2: 132). His phrases echo Bolshevik slogans of peace, land, and bread from seventy years earlier.

The works discussed above are thus openly political; they espouse orthodox Soviet ideology and portray the Communist Party as the bedrock of that system of beliefs. The books also praise military virtues; they support a subtext of impending global crisis between western values and Soviet ideals, of which individual battles are harbingers. Finally, his novels reflect some of the principal ideological tenets of socialist realism such as partiinost', ideinost', and positive characters. If the ideal socialist realist novel may be described as one in which the probability of disagreement in interpretation among all possible readers approaches zero, then Prokhanov's early works, with their stylistic reinforcement of an unambiguous ideological message, are good examples of the genre.

After 1988, however, Prokhanov's ideological message seems to have become diluted, first with a pragmatic recognition that Soviet power could not win the war, and ultimately with the realization that both army and society had been severely traumatized. In contrast to his earlier novels, Prokhanov's stories now dispense with political

motivations for fighting, and even document working arrangements between previously implacable foes. In 'Kandahar Outpost' (39-92) the author details the uneasy truce which developed between many Soviet commanders and the surrounding villages. Lieutenant Shchukin, platoon leader at a small Soviet outpost protecting an arterial highway, has previously punished the villagers for providing succour to the enemy by cutting off their supplies, but this tactic has been counter-productive. In return for information about attacks, therefore, he has agreed to spare the village, and has allowed supplies to be delivered. Consequently, he is warned by a delegation of Afghan elders of an impending attack by the mujahedin. Against an organized defence, the enemy dares not attack, and a supply convoy passes through without mishap the next morning.[27]

Not only does Prokhanov acknowledge unofficial treaties, but he also recognizes that whole segments of the Afghan population were taking up arms against the Soviet-backed regime. The narrator states laconically that 'young men left the village to join the mujahedin and fight in the "green zones"'(42). Furthermore, the enemy is now granted the appellation of 'mujahedin' as opposed to the officially approved term 'bandits' (dushmany) or the colloquial 'ghosts' (dukhi). At the conclusion to 'Kandahar Outpost', Prokhanov goes so far as to say that

> When the time comes to recall the day-to-day life at the outpost, the fullness of years will reveal how platoon commander Shchukin, and Lieutenant Dzhabar, and the dead mujahedin chief Karim, and a multitude of others who were at the outpost, all served the truth as they saw it, how each believed in the genuinely just life, each from his own minaret or own bell tower, and how that faith, in this Kandahar suburb, turned into a terrible, long war. (88)

With the phrase 'each from his own minaret or own bell tower', the omniscient narrator now grants ideological equality to the opposition.

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[27]See also 'Sinitsyn', Tretii tost 501-20, wherein the village which is inhabited by the families of the mujahedin, and to which enemy patrols return once a week, can only be pacified on mutually acceptable terms; and 'Musul'manskaya svad'ba', Tretii tost 129-78, wherein Prokhanov's omniscient narrator also approves of compromise: 'A peace treaty with [mujahedin leader] Seifuddin ... was more valuable than military victories' (133).

It must be emphasized, however, that this 'platoon' story depicts Soviet soldiers as a well-trained and patriotic team. The Blagikh twins, a rifleman and a medical orderly, are great handymen and help to construct the small bathhouse which is the pride of the camp. Senior Sergeant Malyutko is a daring driver of an armoured personnel transport, while two sappers, Kaftanov and Makarevich, take time off from their dangerous job in order to edit and illustrate the camp newspaper. The lieutenant briefly joins in an impromptu football match, then returns to his cramped quarters so that the reader may appreciate the spartan lifestyle which even an officer endures at a small outpost. At the conclusion of the story, an attempt to further engage the reader's sympathy is provided when one of the Blagikh twins loses his life to a sniper's bullet, leaving the other hysterical with grief. Only Private Luchkov from Moscow is a spoiled loner. In general, the platoon presents the image of a prototypical military socialist collective.

But it must be admitted that Prokhanov also allows positive characters to voice previously heretical opinions. The novella 'The Mountains' (3-38) comes from the memory of ex-sergeant Mikhail Vagapov, who now works as a technician helping to build a nuclear reactor in the town of Brody in Ukraine.[28] The central plot begins in a flashback to Afghanistan as Vagapov's platoon is ordered to march into the mountains to destroy an enemy mortar position. En route their lieutenant is severely injured in a land mine explosion, and Vagapov orders a retreat. In a subsequent clash with several mujahedin, one enemy soldier escapes, and Vagapov rashly pursues him, only to be surrounded by a larger enemy force following behind. Vagapov not only realizes that he can expect no mercy from his mujahedin pursuers, but discovers an ideologically tainted spiral of cause and effect behind this mercilessness.

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[28]This story is part of Prokhanov's serialized novel 'Shest'sot let posle bitvy', Oktyabr' 8 (1988): 3-117; 9 (1988): 21-142. 'Gory' may be found in Oktyabr' 8 (1988): 72-92. 'Shest'sot let', not under discussion in this thesis, follows the tradition of the 'production novel', in this case, dealing with the problems of constructing a nuclear power generating station in the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, which may be said to deal with the 'social, managerial, and technological issues of industry currently of concern to the Party.' Definition from Rosalind J. Marsh, Soviet Fiction Since Stalin: Science, Politics and Literature (London: Croom Helm, 1986) 23.

Because he had killed those six [mujahedin], who now lay on the path. But those six had cut the lieutenant to pieces. But the lieutenant from his BTR, following the tanks, had fired at the caves which hid machine-gun nests. But the machine-guns had wounded and killed sappers. And so endlessly they kill each other, and he, Vagapov, is now a link in this chain of killing. And now the time had come for him to be killed (35).

Although Vagapov is saved by the timely appearance of a Soviet helicopter, and lives to dedicate his life to positive goals, his unit is destroyed.

An even more blasphemous sentiment than that found in 'The Mountains' is voiced at the end of 'Muslim Wedding' (129-78), which is told from the vantage point of Lieutenant Baturin, a Soviet interpreter.[29] The tale opens during negotiations for which he translates between Captain Berezkin, his Soviet commander, and Fazli, an Afghan teacher serving as emissary for Amir Seifuddin. In exchange for rifles, Seifuddin has agreed to cease fighting the Soviets and instead will join forces with them against a mullah named Akram, his local competitor in the drugs trade. That evening, a civilian taken from a bus suddenly claims to be Akram's ex-lieutenant, recently punished for seeking peace with the Soviets. When the prisoner offers to lead the Soviets to the wedding celebrations of Akram's relative, a flight of helicopters is launched. That morning, Berezkin, Baturin, and their prisoner witness the destruction of the wedding party as the enemy is taken by surprise. Soon after they return to base, however, news comes of an unexpected attack on a Soviet column by Amir Seifuddin's troops. Fazli then appears, cursing the Soviets for their perfidy; Seifuddin's son has been killed on his wedding day by a Russian gunship attack. With the realization that they have been deceived by their prisoner, Captain Berezkin vows revenge, while Baturin meditates instead on past futile efforts and inevitable future disasters, and senses his own spiritual death.

Behind Baturin, a vast country stretching between three oceans, in torment and convulsions, in strength and in naïve ignorance, sent regiments into a crowd of foreign peoples to fight a long, senseless war (157).

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[29]'Musul'manskaya svad'ba' was first published in Moskva 2 (1989): 24-54.

When Baturin imagines the forthcoming attack on a village, he sees the result as nothing more than additional waves of bitter refugees (138).

Likewise, in the story 'In a Village' (377-416) the hard-working Captain Makarov is completely disillusioned. His company surrounds an enemy village which will shortly be levelled by artillery fire. As Makarov visits his most troublesome platoon, the reader is introduced to the lazy yet sly Lieutenant Kunin, who has just awakened; his clever and devoted Sergeant Korimov; the peasant soldier Morshalin; and the intelligent yet irresponsible Stepanchuk. The captain thinks that misfortune hovers over the platoon, and returns to the command post after warning Kunin to remain vigilant for enemy troops lurking in the surrounding 'green zone'. Kunin has other priorities, and organizes a lightning raid on the empty village to steal valuables before the artillery strike destroys it. Stationing Marshalin at the village outskirts, Stepanchuk at an approaching alley, and Sergeant Karimov on the roof, Kunin enters a house and steals some jewelry. Meanwhile an enemy Afghan patrol hiding in the nearby green zone use the underground irrigation system to creep up on the soldiers; a coordinated ambush kills each of the Soviets instantly. The mujahedin escape underground as the bombardment commences. The story concludes as Captain Makarov arrives after the attack to view the recovered bodies, and after finding stolen goods in Kunin's pockets, he slaps the corpse in outrage.

Captain Makarov has been ruined by his experience in Afghanistan: 'In his mind, the ideal image of an officer had been destroyed' (380). The word 'senseless' (bessmyslennyi) appears throughout the story (379, 410), and is repeated three times in one paragraph to emphasize Makarov's loss of faith in the justice of the war and the effectiveness of the army (395). This 'platoon' story depicts corruption as the only source of social unity for a group of men engaged in otherwise meaningless fighting.

In 'Sinitsyn', too, Captain Mokeev's sole purpose is to survive and to ensure the safety of his men (501-20). In this story, the frail eponymous hero has failed to wash the spoons during kitchen detail, for which he is beaten by Sergeant Lobanov. The next morning Sinitsyn is missing. A village merchant discloses that during the

night a Soviet soldier has disappeared into the 'green zone' and is being transported to Pakistan. Despondent over the prospect of an official investigation, Captain Mokeev, the site commander, seizes several Afghan hostages from the settlement. When a village delegation arrives to plead for the return of the innocent prisoners, the captain demands Sinitsyn in exchange. The soldier is indeed brought back, slumped over a mule, apparently drugged. Only after the prisoners are exchanged does Mokeev discover that Sinitsyn is dead, stabbed cleanly under the heart and drained of blood. In revenge, Mokeev orders his artillery to shell the village. He vainly pursues the mujahed chieftain escaping on horseback, and despairs at the result of his effort, symbolized by the body of a child who has been killed in the bombardment. This loss of purpose -- and innocence -- has given him the impression that his life in Afghanistan is imaginary (504) and that he is looking at a mirror image rather than the real world (508). The story's final line reveals his realization that the nightmare is in fact reality, and that there is no escape from the despair which has come to dominate his life (517).

Another story in which survival replaces military victory as the goal is 'Going Home!'. Three recently demobilized sergeants, Vagapov, Krasukha, and Golovnev, are picked up by their deputy battalion commander to be driven from their highway outposts to the regimental headquarters, from where they will be transported to Kabul before their flight home (521-43).[30] When the BTR is hit by a mortar shell, only Vagapov is thrown free, but then he is shot by an enemy soldier. Vagapov regains consciousness in the regimental morgue next to the bodies of his slain comrades, and crawls from the building to be discovered by a guard. The epilogue reveals that despite the next months of semi-consciousness in hospital, he finally reaches his destination.

Prokhanov now presents fully developed negative Soviet characters as central protagonists, such as Vlasov in 'My Sweet Boy' (93-128). Warrant Officer Vlasov is a

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[30]This story is part of Prokhanov's serialized novel 'Angel proletel', Nash sovremennik 10 (1991): 5-60; 11 (1991): 91-141; 12 (1991): 46-107. The story 'Domoi!' may be found in Nash sovremennik 11 (1991): 114-27. 'Angel proletel' is a sequel to Prokhanov's earlier novel 'Shest'sot let'. Mikhail Vagapov, hero of the short stories 'Domoi!' and of 'Gory', is portrayed as an enterprising worker (for example, see Oktyabr' 8 (1988): 10) who is galvanized into action by his service in Afghanistan.

food supply manager who must escort a heliborne shipment of rations to a Soviet patrol operating deep within enemy territory. The story opens in the hero's quarters as Vlasov attempts to put an end to his long-running affair with Larisa, a waitress at the officers' mess. Vlasov is due to leave Afghanistan in a week, and now openly displays a picture of his wife and family near his bedstead. Spurned, Larisa curses him, "I hate you! ... I hope you return as a cripple to your little goose of a wife...' (98) During the flight later that night, Vlasov's helicopter is hit by enemy fire. Two of the three crewmen are killed, while Vlasov and the flight engineer parachute from the burning craft. After Vlasov's capture by enemy soldiers, he is shown evidence of the flight engineer's execution, and is himself severely beaten. Vlasov's last hope for rescue disappears along with the Soviet helicopters which attack the village where he is held. The villagers now curse Vlasov for the destruction wrought upon their town; they castrate him, drag him to the nearby river and tie him to a raft, then set him afloat toward Soviet-controlled territory. He is discovered the next day still alive by friendly soldiers, after having experienced the depths of physical anguish, and having suffered moral guilt in a hallucination peopled by his family and his former lover.

The warrant officer is portrayed as a scavenger: he unofficially 'requisitions' supplies of caviar and vodka; the knife on his wall was stolen from a dustbin; even Larisa has been taken from the officers (96). He lies to Larisa about his intention to leave his wife (97), laughs over a pilot's joke merely to ingratiate himself (102), and begs for mercy before the enemy (111).[31] And in the end Vlasov receives no sanctuary from the Afghans. After his emasculation, while floating down the river, he sees a child on the bank and calls out for help. The boy runs away as if for assistance, but returns with a rifle, only to take aim and shoot at Vlasov (125-26). As if to underscore the indifference of the universe to his anguish, his final suffering is juxtaposed against the image of a brightly coloured bus coming along the road, and the indifferent eyes of the goats which are grazing near the river (128).

[31] More obviously, his name evokes the memory of Andrei Vlasov, the traitorous Soviet general who was captured and subsequently fought for the Germans during the Great Patriotic War.

The Afghan characters in 'Muslim Wedding' are also better developed than those of his earlier stories, perhaps owing in part to Prokhanov's choice of an interpreter as main character. Instead of relying on commentary from an omniscient narrator, or quoting the Afghan's broken Russian, or inventing Afghans who speak fluent Russian, Prokhanov chooses an alternative convention. The author uses Baturin's interpretation as indirect speech to allow direct translation.

> -- Enough of the ceremony! -- said Berezkin in a hurried manner. --Let [the bus driver] tell us where he came from and who he was transporting.
>
> Came from Musakal, answered the driver. Took grain there, and people back, some to Musakal, to the bazaar square, some were dropped off along the road. Many people, but few buses. They're afraid to travel. So the bus was full, can't turn anybody away. Everyone has their own business, their own cares, and he decided to help people, take them on board the bus. He hadn't done anything illegal, simply went home.
>
> --Where did you spend the night?
>
> In Musakal, of course. Didn't drop in to see anyone, straight to the bus. Delivered the grain to Seid Akbar, it's his grain, anyone can confirm that. And in the morning people began to gather in the square. He seated them and drove away, and that's all. Anything more than that he doesn't know (154).

With this technique Prokhanov grants Afghan characters equal narrative status with Russians.

In contrast to the ideologically correct images found in the earlier works, negative images now abound. 'My Sweet Child' portrays a demoralized Soviet army in retreat from a devastated country. In contrast to the 'powerful technosphere of the airport' found in 'Battlefield Artist' (9: 39) is the dilapidated airfield ('in the ninth year of the war') (98) and the stockpiles of rancid foodstuffs in 'My Sweet Child' (96). Also from the latter story, Vlasov recalls from a previous stay in hospital the endless procession of amputated limbs being carried away (104), and at the end he curses his commanders, the army, and the nation for his fate (124).

Futility and cynicism also mark the entire military operation in 'Sign of the Maiden' (417-88). This 'platoon' story tells of the clandestine mission of a unit sent into a 'green zone' to suppress enemy artillery. Major Grachev conceals his men in a covered lorry which 'breaks down' near a Soviet outpost. The drivers abandon the vehicle according to plan, and under cover of night the platoon then emerges and splits

into two groups in order to attack the mortar site. The operation goes awry when Grachev's men encounter enemy soldiers en route. Warrant Officer Kologrivko captures several men and ties them up, but a firefight breaks out with those who follow. Surrounded in an abandoned farmstead, the Soviets are killed one by one in terrible battle. In the morning, Grachev executes the prisoners and then wraps himself in explosive charges, which he detonates after approaching the enemy positions with a white flag. The only survivor is Kologrivko, who accidentally falls into an underground irrigation tunnel. He hides from the mujahedin, who now also take refuge there from attack by Soviet reinforcements. The warrant officer's last ordeal occurs when the Russians dump oil into the subterranean canals and ignite it to flush out the enemy. After a desperate hand-to-hand fight, Kologrivko finally emerges, naked, scalded, and exhausted, to be saved by his own troops.

Far from being motivated by idealism in this story, Major Grachev is using the mission as a chance to regain his battalion after being demoted for drunkenness (423). Moreover, Lieutenant Moldovanov is full of bravado but cannot shoot straight (436); and Warrant Officer Belonosov has been 'volunteered' against his will, with no illusions about the outcome of meddling with the enemy: 'Let them sort it out among themselves, why should we interfere in their business?' (420) Again, the Soviet adventure in Afghanistan is characterized by rubbish accumulated over the previous ten years (435). To underscore the military quagmire of the war, the operation depicted in 'Sign of the Maiden' seems doomed from the outset. The ostensible purpose of the mission is to suppress artillery attacks on the provincial capital, but the real purpose is to mollify the governor on the eve of Soviet withdrawal. 'That'll make it easier to drag our tails out of here', bitterly observes a colonel (420-21). Even an Afghan ally who provides them with information is suspected of being a double agent (425). In another episode, a camel rider happens to pass the lorry while the soldiers wait inside. As the rider's crop brushes the tarpaulin covering, the troops sense that the enemy now know of their whereabouts (445). Indeed, the camel rider is on a reconnaissance mission (481); the Russians collide with a much larger force than expected; and the enemy even

intercepts their radio communications, sending up false flares to confuse each half of the Soviet strike force (456).

Prokhanov uses this story to engage in unprecedented criticism of Soviet leaders. Kologrivko recalls the sight of sleek limousines on the early morning Moscow streets in contrast to his own poverty at the time (467). Grachev blames Brezhnev's political leadership for ruining the army: 'Who sent us! Who brought shame on us, on Russians?' (476) Belonosov complains: 'This entire desert is strewn with our steel, while at home you can't even find a nail in the shops ...' (427). Moreover, a sergeant criticizes writers who have evaded the draft and attended university, while sons of workers and peasants fight in their stead. In return, journalists now write articles about how returning veterans are not normal and need care (430).

These attacks, it must be noted, are never directed at the Party rank and file. Indeed, Prokhanov's 'Party-mindedness' extends to his later works as well, as seen in this 1989 portrayal of a political officer:

A political officer walked up, tall, erect, in a netted camouflaged jacket, with a raffish moustache that was covered in dust.

-- So, my fine Guardsmen, been baking in the sun like potato chips? -- He said this in a bantering way which showed his support for the soldiers, all the while attentively looking at their faces, reading the signs of fear and fatigue. The soldiers loved their political officer -- his brusque humour which never insulted them, his constant presence in the company, whether during breaks, on the march, or in battle ('The Mountains' 10).

Instead, his writing reflects a loss of optimism. This vital component of socialist realism, which was present in his first novel, is replaced in stages by an increasing sense of despair.

Prokhanov's use of plot in his war fiction seems to have evolved as well. The attention to plot in the early novels is minimal; the reader is guided past a series of events, any of which may be removed, replaced or rearranged without affecting the meaning of the works. Furthermore, the entire premise of the father's quest for his son in 'Battlefield Artist', wherein Veretenov communicates with Petya by radio during a battle, is also unrealistic. In subsequent stories, however, the succession of events is integral to the narrative and affects the outcome. Grachev's gamble on secrecy is

critical to the platoon's fate in 'Sign of the Maiden'; the meaning of 'My Sweet Child' is inseparable from Vlasov's unexpected capture; and Berezkin's effort to establish local alliances triggers the disaster in 'Muslim Wedding'. The latter tale even attempts to incorporate surprise. In 'My Sweet Child', plot construction raises the act of emasculation to the symbolic level, with Vlasov representing the fate of the Soviet Union as a result of the Afghan debacle.

Prokhanov experiments with the genre of the fable in at least one story in the late 1980s. 'My Sweet Child' resembles a modern fable set during the war in Afghanistan. Larisa is seduced under false pretenses and abandoned; she curses the hero before he departs on a journey; despite the unlikelihood of his being exposed to danger, he unexpectedly falls into the hands of the enemy; the curse is fulfilled. Within the narrative, other external references to the fairy story motif are evident. For example, the pilot tells a joke based on characters from Russian folklore, in which the grotesque Baba Yaga seems to appear as Vasilisa the Beautiful in Afghanistan (101-02).[32] Thus Larisa, earlier in the guise of Vasilisa, now seems to shed that false disguise and vengefully work her evil magic like the witch Baba Yaga. This dimension is missing from Prokhanov's earlier works.

Prokhanov's protagonists become more interesting now that they are credible humans rather than carriers of ideological baggage. Baturin in 'Muslim Wedding' is just such a fully-rounded study, with a psychological background that explains both his strengths and weaknesses. The reader discovers that Baturin's mother has sacrificed her musical talents by marrying Baturin's military father, thereby subordinating her virtuosity on the violin to the 'din of military band music' (156). Thus we see Baturin's life formed externally by following his father's career yet retaining his mother's soul, so that he eschews a barracks party in favour of reading Farsi poetry alone in his room (161-62). He is against the war but feels powerless and therefore remains silent (139), sacrificing his talents, as his mother did, to the more powerful

[32]The characters in this well-worn joke, cited in other accounts of Soviet garrison life in Afghanistan, are Koshchei Bessmertnyi, Zmei Gorynych, and Baba Yaga.

will of his military superiors. Additionally, the protagonists of Prokhanov's early novels are dominated by autobiographical elements: the author's career as a reporter in 'Tree', and his concern for his son who was drafted and faced with the possibility of service in Afghanistan in 'Battlefield Artist'.[33] In his later novellas, the author switches to military protagonists who are not directly autobiographical.

Prokhanov's fascination with technology, dating from stories which he wrote in the 1970s about the applications of technology to Soviet industrialization, also undergoes a transformation in his war fiction. Initially he portrays machines as embodiments of power in the contemporary world:

> You talk endlessly of the mystery of [ancient] Russia, but why haven't you once visited a nuclear station, or travelled to the Arctic oil fields, or sailed the world's oceans in a submarine -- why haven't you been to the places where the people (narod) are struggling at this very instant with incredible intensity? ('Tree' 20)

This attitude extends to his later works when describing technology applied for peaceful purposes, such as the reactor in 'The Mountains'.

> Mikhail had once been to Leningrad. He recalled the palaces and churches, the golden cupolas and spires, the statues and the granite embankments. The entire city was filled with priceless creations from human handiwork of ages past. Today in Leningrad no one built palaces and churches; they were building atomic reactors instead. But a miracle made of steel was just as beautiful, and incorporated just as much ingenuity, and craftsmanship, human labour and patience, as those golden towers and shining cupolas which were reflected in the grey river (6).

The reactor's energy fulfills a practical purpose as well: 'And distant cities and factories will begin to suckle greedily at the white-hot udder made of steel.' (16) The regenerative power of the reactor is reinforced at the conclusion of the story, when Vagapov's pregnant wife unexpectedly appears at the construction site in symbolic representation of a universal 'goodness, beauty, and gentle femininity' of which the reactor is presumably a part (38). Rather than reflecting the 'poetry of science', that is, the Soviet literary theme of extolling the aesthetic beauty of scientific investigation,[34] he seems instead to glorify the powerful or beneficent results of applied technology.

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[33]Prokhanov, personal interview.
[34]Marsh 141.

As Prokhanov becomes disillusioned with the war, however, his faith in the efficacy of Soviet military technology, so evident in 'Tree', seems to decline as well. In 'My Sweet Child' the sound of helicopter rotors resonates within an Afghan village, symbolizing the contact of advanced and primitive technologies. But now the effect is tragic: technology cannot save Vlasov, and results only in the destruction of the village (114). Furthermore, Prokhanov acknowledges the growing technological sophistication of the enemy. The 'savages' whom Grachev curses ('Sign of the Maiden' 456) are now practised electronic warriors who intercept radio messages. Thus, by the second period of Prokhanov's writing, Soviet reliance on advanced weaponry has been transformed into a fatal weakness. Captain Berezkin loathes the 'uncivilized' state of warfare in Afghanistan compared to the complex European theatre of operations ('Muslim Wedding' 139), but ultimately he is outwitted by his Afghan opponents.

Along with this subtext of initial faith and subsequent disappointment in military technology co-exists Prokhanov's evocation of mysticism and superstition. On his own admission, Prokhanov experienced a mystical awakening while in Afghanistan, and this experience seems to appear in different guises throughout his war fiction.[35] Two instances may serve as examples: inspired by a camel's skull, Veretenov meditates on death ('Combat Artist' 9: 92), as does Vagapov after seeing a bird's skull ('The Mountains' 35). Related to the mystical is Prokhanov's one reference to the supernatural. Vagapov recalls that during a night on guard duty he saw a transparent phantom in the moonlight whom he took for an Afghan mujahed ('Going Home!' 536). Vagapov now wonders if it was a mountain spirit guarding its domain. This incident possibly reflects soldiers' lore about the enemy, created over long nights standing guard, similar to stories told about enemy phantoms during World War One.[36] It also is a manifestation in his Afghan War stories of the author's own predilection for depicting a non-rational universe which is not under the control of technology.

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[35]Mention of the experience in personal interview with Prokhanov.
[36]Fussell 121-22.

This mysticism, not confined to the experience of combat (for example, see 'The River' in 'Combat Artist' 9: 145-55), may be related to the incorporation of religious motifs after 1988, as if Prokhanov had been waiting for greater freedom of the press to introduce them. Prokhanov never incorporated anti-religious propaganda in his war literature; outwardly, at least, he was even sympathetic to Islam ('Combat Artist' 9: 100-01), blaming only the feudal economic system for Afghanistan's woes. As time passed, Prokhanov began to allude to religious inspiration and the role of the Orthodox Church in the lives of soldiers, even though such beliefs had been subject to ridicule and repression in the Soviet army. Lieutenant Shchukin reflects that his repetition of the phrase 'situation normal' in his diary 'sounded like an incantation, a prayer of gratitude to the Almighty, whose mercy had not been taken from them' ('Kandahar Outpost' 54). Belonosov secretly carries with him a small icon of St. George, patron saint of soldiers ('Sign of the Maiden' 429).

The religious motif is especially prominent in 'Three Men in a BTR' (307-56) which describes the ill-fated journey of three men who set out to deliver a damaged armoured personnel carrier to a maintenance depot. The three men dislike one another and have little in common: Sergeant Chernov comes from an urban intellectual background, driver Yakovlev grew up on a farm, while machine gunner Sretensky is the son of a priest. The crew join a column of lorries, but the BTR soon overheats. Instead of waiting for the next passing column to give them a tow, the crew use water from their canteens to enable the BTR to reach a nearby irrigation canal. There they are ambushed by an enemy detachment. Unable to make contact because of a broken radio, Chernov attempts to reach the road on foot, but is driven back by another enemy squad. Out of ammunition, shell-shocked by a mortar attack, the crew can no longer withstand the siege. Finally united at the prospect of death, they take their own lives with grenades during the final enemy assault.

Prokhanov digresses from the narrative to describe in detail Sretensky's memories of rural Orthodox holidays (314-15). Adding to this idyllic depiction of religion, Sretensky's father, a priest, does not object to his son's induction into the

army, instead observing that priests served in the Tsar's army (314). Negative notes, however, are sounded: for example, the answer to Sretensky's prayers is a mortar shell landing on the BTR (342). The sceptical Yakovlev also implies corruption and worldliness in church hierarchies:

There was an old church and [an abandoned] priest's house across the river from where we lived, too. Now only linden trees and lilac bushes grow there. We were digging under the lilac bush once, and we found some blue crockery, with gilt edges. See, the priest had blue cups with borders made of gold (311).

At the story's conclusion, however, religion is shown to be a source of mysterious power. An epilogue to the action describes the mystical revelation of their sons' deaths to parents thousands of miles away. One parent sees a vision, a vase accidentally shatters in the household of another, and in the third instance a local woman who suffers from epilepsy and is depicted as a 'wise fool' prophesies death (353-56). Thus Prokhanov's treatment of the contemporary Church is a new element in his war fiction, and remains primarily sympathetic, perhaps reflecting the author's personal espousal of neo-Christian values and his belief in their role in Russia's future.[37] It seems as if Orthodoxy is vying to replace the role in his fiction which was formerly occupied by Communism.

Nevertheless, certain stylistic and thematic characteristics remain constant throughout all of Prokhanov's war fiction. His descriptions of characters are marked by hyperbolic romanticism. The young flight engineer in 'My Sweet Child' is portrayed in unambiguously positive colours ('his eyes reflected sky-blue, and his moustache glinted with golden sparks') (101) while the enemy Afghan interrogator receives the opposite treatment ('tensely baring his yellow teeth') (111). Even more extreme, a treacherous prisoner is likened to a 'jinnee with a shaved head' ('Muslim Wedding' 167). His features reveal his diabolical soul: 'His teeth sparkled behind moist red lips, and his fiery eyes revolved in their sockets' (170); the eyes subsequently appear even more fiendish ('glazishchi') (171).

[37]Jeff Gleisner, "Keeping the West at Bay: An Interview with Aleksandr Prokhanov', Detente 9.10 (1987): 27.

Neither does Prokhanov entirely abandon the plotless tableaux of his earlier works. For instance, the 'platoon' story 'Kandahar Outpost' is merely a series of portraits in the optimistic style of socialist realism found in 'Battlefield Artist'. Except for the Blagikh twins, the story concludes the individual narratives of its characters on a positive note. Lieutenant Shchukin vacillates between depression and hope, but his doubts are cast aside at critical moments through sheer force of will. And although Shchukin despairs of ever comprehending the Afghan internecine conflict (87), his friend, the Afghan lieutenant, vows to learn Russian and to fight on after the Soviet withdrawal (86).

Additionally, Prokhanov's narrative structure and style generally remain conventional and unadventurous. Events are related chronologically, with only memory flashbacks to break the straightforward ordering of events.[38] Prokhanov never violates Chekhov's dictum that a gun introduced in the first act must be fired by the last. As a single example, the seemingly innocuous cord attached to a toy in the flight engineer's pocket dutifully reappears to identify the jacket as belonging to the dead man ('My Sweet Child' 102, 113).[39] And Prokhanov's syntax remains standard. There are a few notable exceptions; three extended paragraphs of romantic analepsis contain no verbs ('A warm hotel room. Not a spark of light. Her heart. Under her eyelids, warm droplets. Bright, hot underneath her closed eyelids.' etc.) ('Battlefield Artist' 10: 82).[40] In general, however, Prokhanov seems to strive for predictability and clarity in his style.

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[38]An exception to this is 'V kishlake'(398-407, 412) wherein the final time sequence when the four soldiers are independently but simultaneously ambushed is repeated for each character.

[39]At times, one wishes for an object, or a promising character dressed in a swallow-tailed coat, to suddenly appear and then inexplicably vanish forever, as in the first page of Gogol''s Dead Souls, but this hope in Prokhanov's war fiction is generally in vain. See Vladimir Nabokov, 'Nikolay Gogol: Dead Souls', Vladimir Nabokov: Lectures in Russian Literature, ed. Fredson Bowers (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981) 19. There are exceptions of a sort in Prokhanov's fiction: a piano turns up out of nowhere in an isolated outpost, for example, in 'V kishlake' (386-87); and Lieutenant Feofanov in 'Kandagarskaya zastava' (66-67) comes alive as an interesting minor character who suffers from chronic typhus, suspects his wife of infidelity, and curses with equal gusto the mujahedin for their delaying tactics, and the Russian cook for his unpalatable stew. Unfortunately, the enemy attack is forestalled, and his wife turns out to be faithful (84).

[40]Another rare deviation in style, though conventional enough, is comprised of broken sentences portraying physical exhaustion in 'Karavan' (279).

Prokhanov's narrative voice is equally straightforward: he always uses a reliable third-person narrator. The action is described primarily from the main protagonist's perspective, so that, for example, if the Russian hero cannot understand directly what is being said in Farsi, the narrator must convey information by other means: 'with their delirium and screaming they demanded his death' ('My Sweet Child' 120). Nevertheless, omniscience is employed to provide information on the emotional states ('She felt, wearily, that he no longer needed her') ('My Sweet Child' 97) or personal histories of secondary characters, in the manner of nineteenth-century novels ('Sign of the Maiden' 423; 'Going Home!' 523-24). Only occasionally is this omniscience moderated by the expression 'perhaps': 'Vlasov saw and realized this. Perhaps he pitied Larisa' ('My Sweet Child' 98); 'The guard who brought the jacket -- perhaps the same man who had killed the flight engineer -- smiled' (113).[41] This artifice affords a rare opportunity for the reader to view the narrator as a character -- perhaps a teller of fables -- even though the probability of drawing a conclusion about events or personae which is different from the narrator's remains extremely low.

Prokhanov invariably employs references to Russian rural life to represent spiritual well-being, so that his stories possess an affinity to the 'village prose' school of Soviet literature. For example, Corporal Borisenkov, the sympathetic mentor figure in 'Caravan' (277-306), is from a rural background. This story opens as newcomer Frolov is being mercilessly driven by Sergeant Kozhemyako during a training exercise. The sergeant has relentlessly persecuted Frolov ever since the newcomer refused to eat his soldier's fare of cold stew. Frolov is saved from utter collapse by the sympathetic Corporal Borisenkov, who gives him advice on ways to survive initial training in Afghanistan. On his first mission, Frolov's heliborne platoon initially stops and searches a peaceful caravan, but afterward, as they fly in their helicopter back to base, they come under fire from an enemy camel train. During the battle, one Afghan turns his rifle on the sergeant, who freezes in panic; but Frolov shoots the enemy. Back at

[41] See also 'V kishlake': 'Glancing at the pool of water from which the tree was growing, he experienced a moment of happiness -- perhaps his first such moment during the war' (404).

base, Frolov falls ill. Sergeant Kozhemyako now feels grateful to Frolov for saving his life, but the sick soldier will accept care only from his friend Corporal Borisenkov.

Borisenkov is but one of many sympathetic characters of peasant stock found throughout Prokhanov's stories. The corporal has this advice for the exhausted Private Frolov on how to deal with the senior troops: '-- If they press you hard, and your eyes are about to pop out of your head, think about something good, something pleasant, and you'll feel better... I, for example, think about our garden, about the vegetable beds ... our soil is black, soft ...' etc. ('Caravan' 282). Baturin, another positive character, has a similarly pleasing childhood recollection of an idyllic northern Russian traditional rural wedding ('Muslim Wedding' 145-46). Although Vlasov in 'My Sweet Child' is a negative character from a rural background, his home and family are presented as a source of moral rejuvenation from which he has strayed.[42] The photograph of Vlasov's wife is described as showing a calm, serious, and nurturing woman standing by a small hut in a meadow ('My Sweet Child' 96). Conversely, portrayals of soldiers from urban environments are negative. The adaptability of men from Moscow and Leningrad to military life is disparaged ('Muslim Wedding' 141), and Frolov is criticized for his pampered existence in Moscow ('Caravan' 290). Chernov, although he exhibits the superficial bluster of a sergeant, is actually a sophisticated dandy who yields command of the BTR crew to Yakovlev, the peasant's son, once the shooting begins ('Three Men in a BTR').[43] Thus, in certain ways Prokhanov sees the 'village as the soul' of Russia.[44] His sympathy for the values of the peasant soldier could be interpreted as forming a subversive subtext attacking the corrupt urban-based Party and military authorities who, despite Prokhanov's seeming

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[42]Other examples are Belonosov ('Znak devy' 428) and Vagapov ('Domoi!' 523-24), who dream of a future idyllic peasant life.

[43]There are exceptions to this general rule, such as Glushkov, a positive character who adores Moscow ('Svetlei lazuri' 195), and Vagapov, who works in a city near a nuclear reactor ('Gory'). Vagapov is also a rare case in Prokhanov's fiction of a military character to be shown as a civilian after his duty in Afghanistan is complete.

[44]David C. Gillespie, Valentin Rasputin and Soviet Russian Village Prose , Modern Humanities Research Association Texts and Dissertations 22 (London: MHRA, 1986) 1-2.

loyalty, might have been seen by the author to have allowed the Soviet Union to disintegrate.[45]

Sergei Yurenen criticizes Prokhanov's excessive preoccupation with and graphic depiction of violence, which in his opinion go 'beyond the boundaries of humanism.'[46] Indeed, most of Prokhanov's stories contain scenes of death and mutilation. One passage, for instance, uses five paragraphs of gruesome detail to describe the killing of an Afghan, the subsequent week-long decomposition of the body, and its ultimate destruction by a tank shell ('Kandahar Outpost' 62-63). But Prokhanov's hyperviolence, for which precedents exist in much twentieth-century western literature, is not necessarily gratuitous. In some cases, such as the one cited above, the description of violence may be justified as symbolic. The mujahed warrior hangs from a rock as if crucified, but it is a symbol of death so terrible that no resurrection is possible, turning the soldiers' initial fascination to horror. Likewise, Vlasov's initiation to war, with graphic descriptions of the effect on the flight crew of a direct hit to the cockpit, is brutally depicted so that it may be contrasted with Vlasov's naïvety ('My Sweet Child' 105). And a depiction taken from 'In a Village' (415) of Lieutenant Kunin's face in death, as well as the description of the soldiers' bodies, counteracts a possible romantic and therefore positive interpretation of Kunin's character, or of heroic conceptions of death in general.

Was Prokhanov telling the truth about what he saw in Afghanistan? His stories seem to evolve as the decade of the war -- and the political transformation wrought by glasnost -- proceeded apace. Initially, the constraints of censorship are evident. In the first novel, for example, he fails to mention the death of any Soviet soldiers, nor does he describe the defection of Afghan army personnel to the opposition. Only the civilian

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[45]Prokhanov characterized the Party as having 'led the nation into a grave crisis, [and having] abandoned the tiller, has self-destructed, leaving the arena, betraying the working people who had trusted it' during 'the dilettantism of the catastrophic first years of perestroika'. Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Dostatochnaya oborona', Pozdnyakov 62.

[46]Yurenen, 'The Vulnerability of Armour' 3.

engineer Ladov ('his open, ingenuous face, full of expectancy') ('Tree' 1: 3) who leads the tractor convoy south, is martyred (2: 90). Prokhanov hints at various controversial subjects, such as the rift in the PDPA between the radical anti-Soviet Khalq faction and the dominant pro-Soviet Parcham faction ('Tree' 1: 12-16). Ismail Said, the positive hero arguing for moderation, would be a member of Parcham, although political constraints might have prevented Prokhanov from openly documenting this conflict. The writer was later to blame this rift, which also split Soviet diplomatic, military and security personnel, as a major factor in the failure to defeat the mujahedin, but he never explicitly mentions it in his fiction.[47]

In the same way, Prokhanov incorporates the history of the region into his fiction beginning with his first novel, but his use of this historical motif provides unwavering support for Soviet official policy. Russian archeologists restore antiquities which have been damaged by the British and the Basmachi rebels ('Tree' 1: 17-18), and an antique British Lee-Enfield rifle is an additional reminder of western imperialism (1: 51). Volkov ruminates on the crossroads of civilization at the border with Pakistan, but the tensions portrayed between various Asiatic peoples seems not to involve the Russians (1: 64, 114). There are occasional exceptions, as in 'Kandahar Outpost': 'How many military campaigns had come along the Kandahar Road! War elephants and camels, cavalry and infantry of ancient kings (tsarei) and sovereigns. And now the lieutenant with his motorized rifle troops had been caught up in this bloody, centuries-long succession of wars.' But this is only a momentary loss of concentration for the hero, who once again concentrates on the impending attack: 'No ... it won't be on their terms!' (64) Thus, Prokhanov seems to use the history of the region as either proof of Soviet beneficence, or as a device to add romanticism to the narrative.[48]

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[47]Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'Afganskie voprosy', Literaturnaya gazeta 17 Feb. 1988: 9.

[48]Other romantic allusions include references to the ancient trail along the Salang Highway, and the description of a holy grave ('Svetlei lazuri' 183). The only political parallels with Afghanistan are drawn -- and Prokhanov is one of few authors to do this -- with other recent conflicts considered by the Soviet government to have been 'wars of liberation', such as in Angola, Mozambique, and Kampuchea ('Derevo' 32).

With his later novellas, however, once-censored topics concerned with combat are actually broached with a degree of frankness. It is admittedly a slow start; only at the end of his second novel does one Soviet soldier die ('Battlefield Artist' 10: 102). But Prokhanov details many artefacts which were also brought to light in publitsistika or emigre literature. Through his stories the reader learns that Soviet special forces disguised themselves as mujahedin on some patrols ('Sign of the Maiden' 426). Simple details are sometimes provided: the lorries in convoys bear the names of the drivers' hometowns ('Kandahar Outpost' 84); the men are tattooed with their blood type designation ("Kandahar Outpost' 46), and they also carry 'funeral rounds' (pokhoronnyi patron) as 'dog tags' for identification ('Caravan' 287).[49] He also describes the so-called 'Kandahar air conditioner' ('Kandahar Outpost' 52). These details are not politically subversive, but they lend authenticity to his narratives.

After 1988, Prokhanov goes on to treat controversial subjects, such as torture, in 'Grandmother's Mountain' (357-76). Lieutenant Colonel Paluvin, the protagonist, works to deliver water to Soviet units surrounding an enemy village. Returning to the command post, his crew capture a mujahed who is planting mines in the road. Instead of shooting him, the crew tie his hands and attach the rope to their BTR, forcing him to run ever faster behind the moving vehicle until he is exhausted. Before the prisoner falls and is dragged to his death, Paluvin orders the driver to stop. He questions the Afghan, discovers that his family was killed in a Soviet attack, and that he has given up repairing roads in order to mine them instead. Despite the ending, in which the colonel orders his disbelieving crew to set the prisoner free, the story implies that this is not an uncommon occurrence.

Prokhanov also documents hostage taking ('Sinitsyn') and execution of prisoners ('Sign of the Maiden') by Soviet troops. 'In a Village' reveals Soviet soldiers as having ransacked homes and enemy caravans, traded on the black market

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[49] As explained earlier, the powder is emptied from a cartridge and replaced with a piece of paper with the soldier's name, unit, and identification number, after which the end is crimped closed. The shell is then sewn inside the collar, making a fireproof means of identification.

with stolen goods (392), and used the sexual services of Soviet women who became part-time prostitutes (398). In 'Muslim Wedding', an organization which formerly would have been treated with scorn, Les Médecins Sans Frontières, is mentioned indirectly when a prisoner reveals that a French doctor extracted a bullet from his leg. A brief reference is even made to a hospital destroyed by Soviet troops (160).

Problems within the army are given more exposure in Prokhanov's later phase. Although the word for harassment (dedovshchina) or its various synonyms never appear in his works, the defection of a Soviet soldier due to bullying by senior troops forms the plot of one story ('Sinitsyn'). Indeed, the author mentions instances of suicide and desertion among the Soviet contingent, and the causes, though they are labelled rumours, include bullying ('Kandahar Outpost' 49). A fair amount of discussion in 'Going Home!' is devoted to the smuggling of contraband goods, although Prokhanov views this phenomenon sympathetically, presumably taking the soldiers' own point of view. Krasukha brings back Japanese watches, but again only as personal gifts (524). Vagapov likewise has only blue jeans for himself, an Indian scarf for his mother, and a pearl-handled jackknife for his brother: 'And that is all that he took home from the war' (530). The customs guards, on the other hand, are portrayed as corrupt: '"The customs guards, those bastards, live like kings on our belongings!"' ('Going Home!' 524)

Prokhanov's use of profanity in his later stories perhaps reflects increasing press liberalization under glasnost. No profane language is present in his first period of writing, whereas 'Sign of the Maiden' contains several such phrases: suka (452), mat' tvoyu (453), shkura-mat' (454), padla, obossalsya (454), der'mo (475). 'Sinitsyn' contains scatological reference ('Luchshe v govne utopis'!') (505) and 'Caravan' adds a sexual epithet to 'v zadnitsu tebe' (333): 'on--kadilo, ya--vodilo, a ty...' suggesting mudilo, pizdilo, or khudilo (333). Even the Afghans threaten in Russian: 'yaitsa rezat' budem!' (351)

But there are areas into which Prokhanov does not venture. No mention is ever made of trade in illicit drugs between Soviet soldiers and the local populace, nor is any

Soviet soldier depicted using contraband drugs. Only two references are made to illegal substances: when Soviet troops in gas masks are shown burning a captured supply of heroin ('Caravan' 285), and when the drugs trade is named as the source of rivalry between warring Afghan chieftains ('Muslim Wedding' 134). In the latter example, Prokhanov mentions opium (ter'yak) being smuggled to Pakistan by Afghans, but the use of anasha by Soviet troops is never broached. Also, no mention is made of the possibility of large-scale smuggling operations in valuable goods conducted by Soviet lorry drivers, plane loaders, or privileged officers, themes which might suggest themselves to western reporters in similar circumstances. And finally, Prokhanov's euphemistic treatment of sex is notable, although he becomes more frank, if not more graphic, in his later stories. Only a switch to the informal ty, as discreet as Turgenev, indicates intimacy between Volkov and Marina in 'Tree' (2: 105). In his later fiction, when referring to sex in the context of the soldiers' world, he mentions more frankly the semeinye, that is, women who become mistresses of powerful senior officers or resourceful warrant officers; and chekistki, those Soviet women who supplement their incomes with prostitution, paid for by the soldiers in checks exchangeable for foreign goods ('In a Village' 398).

Prokhanov's fictional world contains Soviet ethnic minorities, but they are generally stereotypical representations. A Kirghiz is small and wiry 'like a lizard' ('The Mountains' 22), while a Tajik is valued for his ability to prepare pilaf (plov) ('Sky-Blue' 220). In 'Caravan', a roll-call of ethnic nationalities is described. Sergeant Kozhemyako, the Ukrainian NCO, sadistically drives Private Frolov, a Muscovite, on the training ground (279, 289). Two Armenian mortar operators are conspiratorial, speaking to each other in their 'guttural' native tongue (293). A Belorussian machine gunner is quiet, methodical, and hard-working, while a Mordvinian machine gunner is happy-go-lucky, but cries in his sleep from some hidden grief. A Donbass bumpkin whose name is not given -- probably either a Ukrainian or a Russian -- is depicted as a giant bear of a man who takes nonsense from no one, including the tyrannical sergeant. The Russian Frolov, incidentally, has learned to love them all (293). There are

exceptions to this stereotypical group: a Soviet Tajik intercepts enemy radio signals and deciphers codes ('Kandahar Outpost' 56), and Sabirov, a Kazakh, is a medic ('Sky-Blue' 270-71), as is an Udmurt ('Sinitsyn' 514). Generally, however, Prokhanov's fictional characters are moulded by the tasks which they probably were assigned in a majority of actual cases: two Kazakhs reinforce a defensive wall, two Uzbeks work as cooks in 'Three Men in a BTR' (312-13), as does a Tajik in 'Sinitsyn' (505). Central Asians in general are also enthusiastic about carrying out their duty and following their immediate commanders' orders, whether honourable (Salaev rescues Lyutikov, 'Sky-Blue' 220) or corrupt (Karimov enthusiastically assists his lieutenant on a pilfering mission, 'In a Village' 396). Concerning ethnicity, Prokhanov's Soviet platoon resembles the mythic American multi-ethnic bomber crew of World War Two: a diverse yet compatible group of stereotypical characters under the leadership of the dominant -- in this case, Russian -- ethnic group.

On the other hand, female characters in Prokhanov's fiction display a kind of ideological subversion. In portraying an educated Afghan woman who presumably represents a product of the revolution, the author reproduces her halting Russian, and so reduces her to simple-minded glee over Gorky's novel Mother, or inarticulate indignation over a mujahedin attack ('Combat Artist' 10: 27). In contrast is Prokhanov's depiction of an uneducated rural woman wearing a chador, who seizes an anti-aircraft gun and furiously shoots at Soviet gunships flying overhead ('My Sweet Child' 118-19). That characterization is consistent, at least, with the mythical female warrior in 'Sign of the Maiden', half human, half equine, who seems to reign over the destruction of the Soviet unit. Prokhanov's Afghan females do not seem to conform to the stereotype demanded by Soviet ideology. With Soviet female characters, however, he reverts to depictions which generally emphasize servitude. The story 'In a Village' portrays women in ways which support the narrative's general theme of corruption (398): these saleswomen, waitresses, and hotel hostesses are all lovers of senior officers or warrant officers. Moreover, the lieutenant visits a dishwasher who supplements her income with checks received for prostitution. Another story recounts

the pitiable fate of Soviet camp followers such as Larisa, who is discarded by her lover Vlasov as he approaches the date of his departure ('My Sweet Child' 97-98). In one variation on this sub-textual motif of subservience, 'Sky-Blue' provides an interesting insight into everyday life along the highway with the picture of a Soviet saleswoman from the military exchange. She drives a mobile van, selling cigarettes and drinks to the soldiers stationed along the route. Her character putatively provides comic relief, always appearing at the most inopportune times (223), although she too ultimately assists the war effort by donating her vehicle to the troops (261). In contrast to this depiction of Soviet woman, however, is the matronly image of Russia which provides succour in several stories. In 'My Sweet Child', for example, Vlasov's need for support is represented by the feverish illusion of his grandmother calling to him from the river bank. Likewise, the representation of moral inspiration in 'Grandmother's Mountain' is an elderly woman. In these cases, Prokhanov employs a female image from 'village prose' to reinforce the nationalist and patriotic theme in his war fiction.

One interesting picture which is revealed in Prokhanov's fiction, and which might be viewed as inconsistent with conservative ideology, is his portrayal of Afghan non-combatant civilians as disinterested observers of the fighting. In 'Going Home!', the burbukhaika drives past the wreckage of the Soviet BTR without stopping to check for wounded (539). In 'The Mountains', the Afghan drivers have lunch while the Soviet scouts press forward in a BTR to locate enemy positions (16). Merchants are portrayed as wily, feigning respect to both sides in their quest for profits ('Going Home!', 534). It seems a remarkably accurate assessment of the political disengagement and deep sense of futility which must have been experienced by a great part of the native population.

Prokhanov's treatment of the military leadership, though innocent at first glance, is perhaps slightly more disparaging than first appears. Prokhanov believes that the art of war can be mastered with applied learning and valour, as Glushkov demonstrates in 'Sky-Blue'.

There was fear. There was anxiety. There was hard work, striving at the limit of strength and intellect. There was a white-hot knowledge of this battle, of oneself, created for this battle, making possible the very conduct of the battle (245).

Prokhanov seems to place an emphasis, however, on recognizing the need for a new type of soldier. In the episode criticizing the Moscow inspector, the soldier who is positively portrayed for his valour is compared to Denis Davydov, the unorthodox leader of partisan troops in the War of 1812 ('Sky-Blue' 233).[50] This story reveals a growing split between senior officers removed from the battlefield or unwilling to adjust to new tactics, and junior officers in the field attempting to fight the war, adjust tactics, and manage men. This is reflected at the conclusion of 'In the Village', where Lieutenant Colonel Paluvin (in this context, the junior officer) must build a general's banya while struggling to deliver water to soldiers in the field. This 'generation gap' is reflected yet again when Makarov, after fighting off a mujahedin incursion, receives over the radio from the battalion commander only his usual 'morning portion of criticism' ('In a Village' 381). In the literature of a writer such as Prokhanov, this image seems to reflect deeper divisions within the military than it would in an author who is less committed to orthodox communist values.[51]

We may observe, then, that Prokhanov's Afghan War fiction evolves from his early political novels to exhibit a much greater degree of openness after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. His positive ideological message is replaced by a revealing portrait of the disillusionment with the war as experienced by the Party and the military. His later works show despair among military men and corruption throughout the ranks, as the army found itself occupying stationary positions, fighting a defensive war, able to destroy villages but not supply lines. The inner frustration of the combatants is reflected in 'platoon' stories such as 'The Sign of the Maiden', 'The Mountains', and

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[50]A similar reference to Denis Davydov is made in Prokhanov's article 'Zapiski na brone' 14.
[51]This corresponds to Prokhanov's observation that mothers, prisoners and war invalids know 'the whole truth about the war', while generals and diplomats have their 'own picture of the war.' See Aleksandr Prokhanov, 'The Accoustics of an Explosion', Soviet Literature 8 (1989): 136. This statement is an implicit rebuke of General Lizichev's earlier criticism of authors who view war as a subjective phenomenon, open to different interpretations, wherein he cited Prokhanov as an example of proper objectivity. See Lizichev 175.

'In a Village', where psychological conflict may be seen to mirror the ideological contradictions of the Afghan War. Fully-developed negative Soviet characters surface, non-communist Afghan characters gain parity with Russians, and Soviet protagonists voice political opinions which would have been blasphemous a decade earlier. Moreover, the roles of technology and Soviet ideology in Prokhanov's war fiction are replaced by renewed interest in religion, an outgrowth perhaps of a tendency toward mysticism which is present in his work from the beginning of the decade. His war fiction is not 'village prose'; yet certain 'village prose' characteristics, such as the 'search for new values', and an inclination toward nationalism,[52] become more noticeable in his war fiction. This is especially true because of the neutralization of Soviet technology as a factor in the war, an element normally representative of power in Prokhanov's fiction, and an obviously incongruous element in village prose. The author's conventionally romantic style and emphasis on violence do not change fundamentally; he remains vulnerable to criticism that he has not advanced beyond the stylistic limitations of socialist realism, nor has he risen above a fascination with military power, and the subordination of art to political goals. Nevertheless, plot and characterization become more complex -- evidenced especially by 'My Sweet Child' and 'Muslim Wedding' -- as the role of orthodox communist ideology in his fiction declines.

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[52]Gillespie 1-2.

Chapter Seven

The Fiction of Oleg Ermakov (Part One)

This chapter introduces the work of Oleg Ermakov, a young author who exemplifies the new generation of writers treating the war in Afghanistan since the introduction of glasnost. Because I consider Ermakov to be the most important and original prose writer on the war, the next three chapters will be devoted to his works. His style has remained consistent, and the form and content of his stories appears relatively little affected by political considerations; rather, Ermakov's works are unified by the author's apparent desire to explore the changes wrought by the war upon the individual soldier. Because Ermakov's separate stories may be assembled to present an encompassing picture of the war, I will forego an analytical framework based on publication date. Instead, I will analyse his short stories in chronological order according to setting and theme, as protagonists prepare to leave for the war, then engage in the fighting, and finally return home. This chapter will treat those stories in which protagonists either anticipate or take part in combat. The following chapter will cover stories which occur wholly or in part within the Soviet Union after the protagonist has taken part in the fighting. The last chapter will use Ermakov's recently published novel as a basis for drawing general conclusions about his works as a whole.

In March 1989 Grigory Baklanov, editor of Znamya, introduced two stories by a 28-year-old writer named Oleg Ermakov. Ermakov had appeared in print only once before, in the pages of Oktyabr' fifteen months previously, and had attracted little notice. Suddenly, however, he appeared on the scene with a series of short stories about the war in Afghanistan which were published in rapid succession by Znamya and Novyi mir. Ermakov's formal education had stopped after middle school; his service in Afghanistan from 1981 to 1983 was followed by a brief tenure as a journal staff

writer.[1] Shortly thereafter, his talent was recognized not only by Grigory Baklanov but also by Vladimir Lakshin, eminent literary critic and member of the editorial board of Znamya. Upon meeting Ermakov for the first time, Lakshin was astounded to find that the author was not a brash fellow promoting his first literary efforts, but rather a self-effacing young man with barely a word to say.[2] After his stories were printed in Znamya and Novyi mir, Ermakov was inducted into the Writers' Union, but he shunned further publicity as well as a chance to reside in Moscow. He even refused a state-sponsored trip abroad, choosing instead to live in the countryside where he grew up. Working part-time as a meteorological technician, he lives with his wife (a biology teacher) and child near Smolensk.[3] In 1992 he completed his first full-length novel 'Znak zverya' ('The Sign of the Beast') based on his experiences during the war.

Each of Ermakov's fictional works is concerned with the Afghan conflict. His first story, 'Prosto byla osen'' ('It Was Simply Autumn'), published in the December 1987 issue of Oktyabr', was followed by a fifteen-month hiatus before the March 1989 appearance of two stories in Znamya, 'Kreshchenie' ('Baptism') and 'Zheltaya gora' ('Yellow Mountain'). Novyi mir published 'Blagopoluchnoe vozvrashchenie' ('Safe Return') in August 1989, and Znamya followed two months later with six short tales in a collection entitled 'Afganskie rasskazy' ('Afghan Tales'): 'Vesennyaya progulka' ('Spring Stroll'), '"N-skaya chast' provela ucheniya" 1981' ('"Unit X Conducted Training Exercises" 1981'), 'Zimoi v Afganistane' ('Winter in Afghanistan'), 'Mars i soldat' ('Mars and the Soldier'), 'Pir na beregu fioletovoi reki' ('A Feast on the Banks of the Violet River'), and 'Zanesennyi snegom dom' ('The Snow-Covered House'). These six stories are unrelated except for an implied chronological arrangement of themes covering conscription, combat experience, and final homecoming. Ermakov's most recent short story 'Kolokol'nya' ('Kolokol'nya', a place name) appeared in the 29

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[1]Ol'ga Trunova, personal interview, Moscow, 14 Jan. 1991. Ms Trunova, the editor at Znamya who works with Ermakov's manuscripts, did not know which journal had employed Ermakov.
[2]Vladimir Lakshin, literary critic, personal interview, Oxford, 31 May 1990.
[3]Trunova, personal interview. See also Grigory Baklanov, introd., 'Rasskazy', by Oleg Ermakov, Znamya 3 (1989): 93; and Igor' Zolotussky, introd., 'Kolokol'nya', by Oleg Ermakov, Literaturnaya gazeta 29 August 1990: 6.

August 1990 issue of Literaturnaya gazeta, and the initial part of his first novel, 'The Sign of the Beast', appeared in the June 1992 issue of Znamya.

Soviet criticism of Ermakov's work was favourable. Shortly after the appearance of 'Safe Return', the critic Petr Tkachenko singled out three of Ermakov's stories for comment in his review of Afghan war fiction. He called Ermakov 'without doubt a gifted prose writer' in whose work could already be discerned trends characteristic of 'Afghan' literature as a whole. In Tkachenko's opinion, these trends not only include factual and historical fidelity to events as they actually occurred, but also the portrayal of the psychological and moral strains endured by soldiers who fought in Afghanistan. Thus he praised 'Yellow Mountain', a story about a disabled veteran returning to civilian life in the Soviet Union, for its 'psychologically penetrating' narrative style employing the stream of consciousness narrative technique. In 'Baptism', a soldier is forced by his own sergeant to murder a prisoner of war; Tkachenko described this plot as an expressive medium for a 'psychologically devastating situation' which presents not only the hero but also the reader with a choice between spiritual rebirth and moral death. His only adverse criticism was reserved for Ermakov's use of dialogue in 'Safe Return', which he thought in one instance lacked verisimilitude.[4]

Four other critics, including a representative of the official military viewpoint, have since added their evaluations of Ermakov's contribution to this new body of war literature. Each echoes Tkachenko's comments about the two main points of view used by Ermakov in his stories: the alienated outsider examining fault lines in the Russian psyche; and the prophet of moral choice in situations where there are no longer any clear moral, ethical, or political guidelines. Dmitry Ol'shansky, a psychologist who treats Afghan veterans, calls the first point of view Ermakov's 'alienated consciousness living next door to the rest of us'.[5] And he emphasizes the moral ambiguity of 'Baptism', wherein the reader's simple condemnation of soldiers who murder their

[4]Tkachenko, 'My eshche ne vernulis...' 3.
[5]Ol'shansky 15.

prisoners ignores the stark truism of war: kill or be killed. The critic Vyacheslav Kuritsyn, on the other hand, notes that Ermakov's debut in the 'thick' journals was noticed immediately, not only because his stories reveal the dark pyschological secrets of the war, but also because they have a moral underpinning.[6] Kuritsyn points out that Ermakov's lyric depiction of nature in a story such as 'Spring Stroll' underscores the author's view of peace as a moral baseline from which man departs when he goes to war. Another sign of the moral weight of Ermakov's stories, in Kuritsyn's view, is their attribution of guilt to those who have transgressed moral boundaries. These boundaries, however, are drawn neither by the state nor by one's comrades, but by the individual alone. This characteristic distinguishes Ermakov's fiction from literary propaganda. Kuritsyn believes that this basic difference affects Ermakov's aesthetic system, not least because it allows the enemy (in this instance the Afghan mujahedin) entry into the realm of literature, which in Soviet fiction of the early 1980s was not the case. Kuritsyn cites Ermakov's story '"Unit X Conducted Training Exercises" 1981' as a salutary example. The critic stops short of espousing a causal relationship between ethical and aesthetic attributes, saying instead that the two are intertwined so closely that one is invariably symptomatic of the other, synergistically transforming a written piece of work into literature. In this regard, he singles out Ermakov.[7] Galina Belaya, the eminent literary critic, mentions Ermakov as one of the most popular of contemporary authors, and indirectly associates him with what she calls the 'literature of decay', that is, a movement in modern Soviet literature running counter to the ideological and idealistic legacy of socialist realism.[8] And finally, Aleksandr Fomenko, contributing a section of literary criticism to a book published by Voenizdat which decries the contemporary anti-military syndrome, nevertheless praises the young author. Ermakov's stories published in Znamya, Fomenko notes, 'indicate an undoubted

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[6]Kuritsyn 217-18.
[7]Kuritsyn 219.
[8]Galina Belaya, 'The Literature of Decay', Moscow News 37 (Sept. 23-30, 1990): 14.

literary gift, the psychological sensibility of a beginning writer who does not shy away from the most complex (in every sense of the term) themes and subjects.'[9]

Criticism of Ermakov has thus far followed the pattern of commentary on 'Afghan' literature in general, with consideration of literary characteristics subordinate to the moral and psychological aspects of the work. The above-mentioned comments are generally valid, but there has been no in-depth analysis of Ermakov to date. He has yet to be placed thematically and stylistically within the context of Russian 'war prose'.

The first story to be discussed, entitled 'Vesennyaya progulka' ('Spring Stroll'), concerns the central character's hike with a girl through the Russian countryside three days before his scheduled induction into the army.[10] After a tiring journey, Vitya and the girl fix a simple meal over a fire in an abandoned village, and awkwardly come to terms with their mutual affection as well as with their impending separation. The tale combines elements of a love story with the larger theme of the threat which the distant war in Afghanistan poses to their burgeoning relationship, indeed to the very life of the hero.

Ermakov initially foreshadows the critical role of the war in Afghanistan by introducing a snake, the first Vitya has seen on his explorations (84). Furthermore, the protagonist conceals this threat. He sees an omen in the girl's coincidental question about snakes, and deceives her about actually having seen the creature on the ground. His denial parallels the perception of the Afghan War in the popular imagination, where lies and silence conspired to conceal the dangerous truth. The first mention of the word 'war' occurs only near the story's conclusion, and then in a context of denial, when Vitya tries to reassure himself about induction by comparing his obligation to that of the early nineteenth-century period under the tsars: 'In three days, it'll be for two years.

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[9]Fomenko, 'Predannaya armiya', Pozdnyakov 76.
[10]Oleg Ermakov, 'Vesennyaya progulka', Znamya 10 (1989): 83-90. After initial citations, subsequent page references to individual stories are provided in the text.

After all, it's not twenty-five years. And it's not war' (88).[11] Yet another evasion of truth is uncovered in the prevarication about having lost his rifle; ultimately he admits to having thrown it into a lake (88-89). Her tentative enquiry about the war, the only direct mention of it in the story's dialogue: 'They could send you ... to that war. Couldn't they?' occurs after much hesitation and euphemistic language, to which Vitya responds only with a shrug. Significantly, he silently ruminates upon but is unable to judge the war because it has received no publicity:

> He had forgotten about that war. Somehow he'd completely forgotten. The newspapers talk vaguely about it, through their teeth. You can't tell whether the Russians are fighting there or if they're planting trees and building kindergartens... (89)

Earlier, the girl is disgusted by Vitya's recollection of a bird with its eye gouged out, another symbolic reference to the war about which she would have preferred not to talk. But the imagery is inescapable. When the girl sees a dead frog floating in a pool, she rechristens the spring, previously called 'Bedouin God' (Bog Beduinov) with a new name, only half in jest: 'Bloodthirsty God' (Krovozhadnyi Bog). Ermakov drives the point home with the girl's final thought: 'Her mouth was hot and dry, like the land of those bedouins and camels', a simile which describes the Afghanistan desert (84). In like manner, Ermakov takes pains to describe the bird of prey hovering overhead while Vitya wonders about his fate (89). Thus the two young lovers maintain their own conspiracy of silence, a conflict made more dangerous through the larger conspiracy of silence across the nation.

Ermakov's sensitivity to the natural environment reveals an almost pagan appreciation of plants, animals, and their habitat. The author sings a veritable rhapsody of flora and fauna: hawthorn and henbane, starlings, thrushes, all suffused with odours of moss, flowers and decomposing vegetation (87). Vitya also lists the natural splendour of various locations, including the cranes at Coffee Ponds; another destination called Fox Hill seethes with chirping and scampering in the undergrowth,

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[11] Prior to the Miliutin reforms of 1874, the length of service for conscripts in the tsarist army was twenty-five years.

an avatar of the eponymous Yellow Mountain (87). Synaesthetic descriptions such as 'velvet hum' combine with archaic terms ('belelo glinistoe oko') (83) to describe the author's fascination with his bee-loud glades. The protagonist's references to these locations ('These are blessed places') (84), ('Oh, in the country! that's paradise') (87) show worship rather than mere admiration.

In a section which apparently contradicts this idyllic portrait of nature, Ermakov looks down upon the landscape from the vantage point of a soaring bird of prey. An entire range of life is visible -- frogs, mosquitoes, bees -- all engaged in the struggle for survival. Also apparent is a horse, swatting away bloodsucking horseflies, which are described down to the proboscis in minute and brutal detail. At the conclusion of this short section, however, the author retreats to a depiction of badgers, wild boars and foxes, each with their brood sleeping safely underground (86-87). Ermakov is capable of depicting the predatory aspect of nature, but his natural world of plants and animals seems to be self-sustaining in its struggle to survive, rather than engaged in a malevolent or meaningless contest. In his imagination Vitya upbraids the snake for its untimely appearance, but more in the manner of reproving a familiar acquaintance, recognizing the creature's right to exist in its own habitat liberated from the symbolic burden of evil in the presence of humans. 'Two glowing points, a brownish green rubbery doughnut-shaped object, you didn't have to appear today, this very last day, now I've got to be afraid, as if you bit the girl; the snake raised its head and smiled' (85). And his amusing description of once being chased by a wild boar makes clear his empathy with the beast who ceased pursuit once the boy no longer presented a threat (86).

This world of natural harmony exists in sharp contrast to the destructive activities of humankind, motivated by suspicion and hatred. The girl is incredulous at Vitya's willingness to travel in the wilds without a rifle as protection against strangers (86). The horse, appearing at the edge of the forest like an unbidden emissary from another and far more pleasant country, spies the two humans and cautiously retreats -- his flanks show wounds from previous mistreatment (86). The animal has been

victimized through contact with humans, the author seems to say, and Vitya is soon to share this condition when he leaves to fight in the war. His pacifist inclinations, revealed through the loss of his rifle, and his wish only to shoot at plywood targets (89), do not bode well for the young protagonist in the impending maelstrom of war.

What lurks beneath the surface of Ermakov's prose? The author often reveals his message only after describing a series of events which unfold in disarmingly simple sequences. The two main characters of Ermakov's 'Spring Stroll' are minor suns orbiting a massive 'black hole' of threatening power -- invisible, yet inexorable. This presence gradually reveals itself, through seemingly innocuous images of death such as the frog floating at the bottom of the pool, to be the war in Afghanistan. Thus, a circling bird of prey, a normal part of the cycle of life and death in the countryside, now takes on added symbolism. Try as he might to isolate himself within the natural world, safe in his primitive world with female companionship, provisions, heat, and shelter, Vitya must return from his walk in paradise to the real world of human strife.

The next story, 'Prosto byla osen'' ('It Was Simply Autumn') takes place in Afghanistan, but shares the lyrical mood of 'Spring Stroll'.[12] Despite the brevity of the tale, it displays many nascent stylistic characteristics of Ermakov's later works, and is therefore deserving of closer analysis. The narrator, looking back on his days in Afghanistan, recalls his observations and dreams while on night watch duty. At the end of one particular watch, his superiors summon him to recite some verses for their entertainment. The denouement is found in the young soldier's unexpected choice of poetry, and the pleased reaction of his small audience.

The opening section sets a lyrical tone: mood, not action, will be of primary consideration. 'Autumn arrived, and the world changed. The sky and the air became different; new colours, bright and glistening, seeped into the greyish-yellow earth. The rains came! Infrequent, but quite cold' (55). In the following brief paragraphs the author also paints the distant mountains and vineyards, adding a V-shaped formation of

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[12]Ermakov, 'Prosto byla osen''.

cranes flying overhead. In the foreground, however, the author continues to fill in details of an army outpost, depicting a gradual transition from the gentle world of nature to the violent world of man. The final paragraph depicts the nightly artillery attacks which emblazon the sky over the provincial capital: 'But twenty kilometres from the regimental camp...every night red streaks would pierce the sky' (55). The imperfective aspect emphasizes routine and the passage of time, however, rather than the immediacy of a specific attack which might involve whatever characters happen to take the stage in the following scene. Thus the lyrical sense is maintained despite the proximate danger.

Kolya Vorzhakov, the main character, thrives in the solitude of night sentry duty because it allows him to dream.

> And so I walked back and forth along the trench, and was glad that the cold numbed the snakes and scorpions. I was glad of the solitude, and thought: 'It's good that the summer has passed. Autumn even transforms this ground. Of course, it can't compare with our autumn, but even here it's nice... Soon I'll get out and return home, wait until September and then spend a month in the forest, I'll live in a tent, catch perch, fry mushrooms, and remember this bare autumn steppe. (57)

Vorzhakov's meditations are so seductive that he sets past and present recollections facing one another like two mirrors, the infinite reflections enhancing the dreamlike quality for the reader. For example, Ermakov could simply describe the scene as he did in the opening section, or declare its beauty, or ascribe the opinion to Vorzhakov ('I thought it was beautiful'). The penultimate step would be to set the story in Afghanistan, and write: 'how pretty I'll think this is when I look back'. But instead he writes: 'I thought: 'how pretty I will think this is'. Thus the narrator Vorzhakov is dreaming even now about a dream in the past in which figures a dream set in the future about his present condition! To emphasize the bliss of this transported state, words such as 'loved', 'enjoyed', 'was happy', 'felt good' fall like a cascade throughout the passage, and are only interrupted at the very end with the word 'feared' in the context of the senior troops. Finally, the very conclusion of the story could be construed as structurally reinforcing this desire on the part of the narrator to slip forever into the

world of contemplation; the narrative itself draws to a close by lapsing into dream with the final impersonal phrase, 'To fall asleep.' (58)

But Vorzhakov is equal to the task of departing from his imaginary world and re-entering the reality of tyrannical and ignorant bullies. When the 'granddads' summon him to entertain them with verses, Vorzhakov swallows his pride and complies, but for reasons of his own chooses to recite a poem by Nikolai Rubtsov rather than Sergei Esenin, as they request. Kolya intones Rubtsov's 'The Cranes', a poem of autumn with the evocation of cranes crying out in the sky. Vorzhakov's audience is awestruck by the impromptu performance, but any further recital is interrupted by the sound of the distant village muezzin's morning call to prayer, at which point the soldiers reluctantly gather their weapons and return to their tent to sleep (58). As in an episode from Scheherazade, the poetically inclined Kolya has used his imagination in a practical way to overcome a threat from a dangerous world and survive another night.

Vorzhakov the dreamer is in possession of truths revealed only through the poetic imagination. In order to show which truths Ermakov has in mind, it will be necessary to look more closely at the poetry which Vorzhakov chooses to recite. The narrator directly quotes the first four lines of Nikolai Rubtsov's 'The Cranes': 'Among the flood-meadow trees the East has proudly shown his fiery features.../Now October will come -- and the cranes will suddenly appear!/And they will awaken me, the calls of the cranes will sound/ Over my attic loft, over the flood-meadow, forgotten in the distance...'[13]

Structurally, the opening of the poem at dawn forms a segue for Ermakov to intimate the coming of dawn with which he ends his own story. Considering the setting of Ermakov's story, the reference to 'the east' takes on added resonance. Also, of course, autumn and the appearance of the cranes in the second line of the poem mirrors their introduction at the story's beginning, and the role they play in setting tone

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[13]The entire text of the poem may be found in Nikolai Rubtsov, 'Zhuravli', Podorozhniki (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1985) 25.

and determining meaning. On a superficial level, the cranes may symbolize freedom, the desire to escape, or the world of nature as opposed to the world of man. On a deeper level, the cranes seem to represent the poetic impulse, with the story's landscape serving as the focus of poetic appreciation. Conversely, tracer shells (which also cut through the sky) could be used as a symbol for the destructive impulse, with the army camp as its proper focus of attention. Vorzhakov, who could be said to represent the world of the imagination, appreciates these visions, and he comes into conflict with brute reality during his encounter with the 'granddads'. Ermakov's theme at this level, then, is the contrast between the creative poetic imagination and the destructive aspect of human endeavor as revealed in the war. The superiority of the world of the imagination is implied: indeed, at the end of the story Vorzhakov wields a lyric poem like a weapon, the mere sight of which wins over his adversaries, if only for awhile.

It cannot be assumed that Ermakov's audience is familiar with Rubtsov's poem 'The Cranes'. Nevertheless, by emphasizing in a series of one-sentence paragraphs that Vorzhakov recited the entire poem to his comrades, and that it had a stunning effect on them, Ermakov is inviting the reader to incorporate the entire text of the poem into his story. And he seems to be hinting at something besides the narrator's simple foray into the imaginative realm. In the fifth line of his poem Rubtsov evokes his ancient, sacred national homeland 'Rus'', and reinforces it with the mention of 'ancient legend' in the following line. The people of Rus' are imagined as united in waving their greeting at the 'proud' cranes (line 9), and the poetic narrator moulds this general description to the immediate moment with the actual sighting of a flock of cranes. He urges others -- whether a child or family, friends, or indeed the people of the nation, is left unstated -- to come outside and catch a glimpse of the birds in flight. The poet sees the cranes as symbolic of his homeland, and wishes to lead his comrades to this vision as well.

The unspoken portion of the poetic text adds a nationalist context to Ermakov's story. Lines two and three of the poem break from the past tense of the opening line,

and employ the future tense to describe an anticipated vision of the cranes (which indeed is fulfilled at the end of the poem). This feature corresponds to Ermakov's only use of the future perfective, which is Vorzhakov's dream about returning to Russia. With the additional weight of Rubtsov's evocations of ancient Rus', Ermakov is not simply opening the eyes of his fellow soldiers to a vision of escape from the war in Afghanistan. He is also beginning subtly to redefine in Russian nationalist terms the context of his country's salvation after the Afghan debacle. Indeed, the troops originally demand a rendition of Sergei Esenin's poetry: 'How about something from the "[Moscow of the] Taverns" [cycle of poetry]?' (57) The distinctly Russian character of Esenin's lyricism marks him as a precursor to Rubtsov; the latter, in his poem 'Sergei Esenin' makes reference to both Rus' and Esenin's 'tavern melancholy' ('kabatskaya grust').[14] The fact that Ermakov's nationalist trumpet is muted by a lyric tendency only serves to make the sound, as with Rubtsov, more evocative.

This story contains in microcosm many of the elements which Ermakov will expand in his later stories. These elements include his painterly prose and pithy dialogue, his use of literary allusion, and the choice of an alienated narrator (who appears to have autobiographical roots) to tell his tales. His indirect psychological approach to depicting combat in fiction goes hand in hand with his love of dreams and the complex narrative structure he builds to reinforce this layered quality of his prose.

From spring and autumn settings we proceed to winter with Ermakov's story 'Zimoi v Afganistane' ('Winter in Afghanistan'), but despite the lyrical suggestion of the title, Ermakov now concentrates more closely on conflict.[15] This story tells of the persecution of a recruit for his religious beliefs. On a winter's evening in Afghanistan, a platoon of Soviet soldiers carries on its usual routine: senior troops play cards, nap, sing songs, while the junior troops stitch in fresh undercollars and wash foot wrappings for their sergeants. Beneath the superficial calm, however, the new soldier

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[14]Rubtsov, 'Sergei Esenin', Podorozhniki 191.

[15]Oleg Ermakov, 'Zimoi v Afganistane', Znamya 10 (1989): 95-107.

Stodolya is being pressured to admit his religious convictions to Ostapenkov, a senior soldier. Indeed, a flashback recounts how Stodolya, before he entered the service, decided to forego study in an institute in order to pursue a religious vocation. Using a stolen letter containing prayers from Stodolya's girlfriend, which seem to confirm the senior soldier's suspicions, Ostapenkov and his friends try to humiliate the younger soldier into confessing his faith. Stodolya finally appears at the entrance to the tent to proclaim his religious beliefs with the last words to the story, 'I believe.'

The theme of the story is religious persecution in the context of dedovshchina. Evocative of the persecuted early Christians, Stodolya is threatened with being branded an 'eternal son' because of his suspected religious conviction, a cause to which he has already sacrificed his studies at the institute, and possibly his girlfriend as well (99). Stodolya even likens himself to the seventeenth-century Russian Orthodox fundamentalist Archpriest Avvakum in his tortured self-appraisal. Ermakov employs Avvakum's vain struggle against reformist Muscovy as a backdrop to Stodolya's fight against the faithless bullies in his tent (100).[16] In turn, this persecution gives Ermakov another opportunity to describe the hierarchy of dedovshchina in detail, with an exposition of the three 'castes' ('finches', with 6-11 months in service, 'scoops', with 12-17 months in service, and 'granddads' with 18 months of service or more) and two strata without caste status: 'sons', with less than six months service, and 'demobs', who are in the last few weeks before departing for home (96). But dedovshchina in the form of religious persecution is seen to extend to the navy as well, as related by a soldier whose brother served at sea (105), and even to civilian life as told by a soldier who worked on a logging crew (100). Other references expand the context to the entire nation: 'if you spit on society, it'll shake it off, but if society spits on you, you'll drown', notes one soldier (96). Moreover, Ermakov notes that the victims of dedovshchina justify the system through the dialectical process in which everyone finally receives his reward. One might say that in the case of the army, communism is

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[16]Information on Avvakum is taken from James H. Billington, The Icon and the Axe (New York: Vintage Books, 1970) 124-25.

achieved when one becomes a 'granddad'; in Ermakov's phrase, the progression is as 'inevitable as the fall of imperialism'. Of course, this army expression is merely a variant of a common satirical graffito which expresses the longing to complete military service, as in 'Demobilization is as inevitable as the collapse of capitalism.'[17] Yet Ermakov's use of this phrase underscores the extent of intolerance -- religious or otherwise -- which permeates his society. Thus Ermakov's images of degradation and persecution (106) become more powerful because of their potential application beyond the army to the nation as a whole. In this story, Ermakov does not forego the lyrical tones of the stories previously discussed. After all, Stodolya remembers reading Chinese poetry which delicately evokes Szechuan wine and the creeping tendrils of the dodder vine (99). But Ermakov juxtaposes this lyricism with the actual depiction of conflict within the ranks. Despite the fact that this conflict falls short of warfare, Stodolya's desperation suggests that like Avvakum, he will ultimately lose to the superior forces of authority.

Ermakov uses this particular story, which takes place during the winter when combat operations usually were suspended, to document the soldiers' physical surroundings. Generally, his stories paint a vivid picture of the early years of the Soviet occupation, which reflects the time when the author served. The soldiers' barracks tent, where so much of Ermakov's action takes place, is depicted in great detail. This tent, made of rubberized canvas and complete with wooden floors, accommodates approximately forty men, is illuminated by kerosene lamps, and has rows of bunk beds in two tiers bordered by stools and footlockers (95). The tent has an iron stove in the middle for heating, but which is also used unofficially for drying clothes and heating food. These ovens could be dangerous: in two stories ('Winter in Afghanistan' and 'Kolokol'nya') Ermakov mentions a possibly documentary account of a diesel fuel-burning stove which boils over and kills an entire platoon in the resultant conflagration. With these details, the reader is provided with a picture of life

[17]Viktor Suvorov, Inside the Soviet Army (New York: Macmillan, 1982) 224.

in an early Soviet military camp in Afghanistan before television became available to the troops, enabling them to watch the nightly 'Vremya' news programmes, or to view movies such as 'Rambo' on video cassette tapes. In Ermakov's stories, troops occupy themselves with more traditional recreation, such as singing guitar songs and playing the card game 'Fool' (95), as did their fathers and grandfathers during the Great Patriotic War.[18]

Ermakov's story 'Kreshchenie' ('Baptism'), published in the March 1989 edition of Znamya, is the author's first published attempt to describe combat.[19] A motorized reconnaissance company decamps at night to ambush a mujahedin supply caravan suspected of hiding in a nearby kishlak (village). The soldiers lie in wait throughout the night, but as morning breaks with no sign of the guerrillas, the captain recalls his forces and sets out to find the caravan. He discovers from a passing group of Afghan Sarandoy militia (self-defence forces) that the caravan has detoured through another village, and so the unit undertakes a house-to-house search upon arrival at the new location. During the operation, one of the soldiers is shot by mujahedin who have remained undetected during the search. The guerrillas are captured, but the sergeant orders two of his inexperienced soldiers to murder the prisoners in reprisal before the officers arrive. One soldier refuses, while the other -- a soldier named Kostomygin, the main character of the story -- carries out the order. A description of Kostomygin's tortured guilt forms the conclusion of the story.

The theme of this story is the hero's loss of innocence. Kostomygin initially views the surrounding landscape in romantic images as he rides along on top of his armoured personnel carrier.

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[18]'Fool', a game similar to whist, is known throughout Russia. My wife and I were invited to play the game by poet and Afghan veteran Aleksandr Karpenko over his kitchen table in Moscow. In fact, the game provided the inspiration for the cover of his previously discussed booklet of poetry Tret'ya storona medali. The cover shows a playing card with two portraits of the poet similar to a face card; one portrait is taken in uniform before his disfiguring injury, the other afterward. 'Fate plays us all for fools, just like a card game', said Karpenko. Vasily Grossman also depicts generals playing 'Fool' during lulls in the Battle of Stalingrad in Life and Fate, trans. Robert Chandler (London: Collins Harvill, 1985) 35.
[19]Ermakov, 'Kreshchenie'.

> In the village with flowering gardens Kostomygin took deep breaths of the fragrant air, and now he had a sweet taste in his mouth. He put his face into the warm wind, felt the weight of the ammunition pouch at his side, felt how his boots were tightly laced and how his camouflaged fatigues were free and light -- and all of this pleased him: this awesome steppe, and the flowering sweetness on his lips, and the comfortable uniform, and the weapon at his chest, and the motion of the powerful vehicles along the endless black and white plain under bright alien constellations. (93)

This is not only a vivid description of his surroundings, but also an effective evocation of innocence. Further on, Ermakov again reveals the musings of an inexperienced soldier who cannot imagine anything but glory in battle, much like young Petya's expectations prior to his fateful cavalry charge near the end of War and Peace. Spellbound, Kostomygin thinks of the letter he will write to his brother, with the sights and sounds of his adventure replaying themselves so quickly in his excited imagination that he can hardly keep up with them:

> This night, this smell of garden flowers, this moon, these hills under the stars, the nightingales, the ambush, the cries of the muezzin at sunrise, the disappointment, and then the encounter, and then -- sun, dust, the clanking and the soot, and the anticipation, and the uncertainty: what will happen in this village of Padzhak? (99)

He thinks briefly of the possibility of death, then categorically rules it out: 'He won't be killed and, in fact, he'll never die. Well, maybe sometime he might die, but that'll be the devil knows when, in a thousand years!' (99) The hero's ambivalence concerning an impending battle is further revealed the next morning as he watches the village awaken. He thinks:

> This is all senseless: no one will appear, there won't be any shooting, -- the sun will simply come up, and then they'll return to the regimental camp. This was his first operation, and he didn't believe that it would be real, like one of those operations the company veterans described in such picturesque terms. (95)

The hero's beliefs are confirmed by the end of the story, of course, but not in the way he had imagined.

In a way that reinforces this initial image of innocence, Kostomygin is mesmerized by his immediate situation. He is focused primarily on his own person, bursting with pride in his equipment -- as revealed not only in the extract quoted above (93), but also in a subsequent description of a soldier moving to take up a position near

the village (94). The hero so revels in the sheer physicality of his protective envelope that despite the difficulty of coping with the bulky gear, the sweat and dust, he seems to enjoy even the lengthy step-by-step procedure of surreptitiously opening his canteen for a forbidden sip of water. Indeed, Ermakov could be called the 'poet of kit' for his evocation of an infantry soldier's identification with the tools of his trade.

Kostomygin's attention is focused also on his own platoon. The elite status of the reconnaissance forces of which he is a member is never far from the hero's consciousness: 'A reconnaissance company -- that's not your average artilllery battery, and certainly not a supply platoon, and not infantry' (94). With higher standards, however, come more severe penalties for mistakes; the unauthorized discipline administered by the senior soldiers also frightens him.

In one month of service in the company Kostomygin had seen enough of 'granddad's courts', and he had absolutely no desire to be one of the accused in the next 'debriefing'. But Oparin had already become one of the blacklisted members. It would be necessary to keep an eye out. (94)

Unlike the clumsy Oparin, Kostomygin apparently has emerged from his first month of duty relatively unscathed, and thus is romantically possessed by an image of himself and his duty which will prove to be unrealistic.

In the third section of 'Baptism', Ermakov expands the scope of authorial attention to encompass the individuals of the unit taking part in the ambush, as if to depict Kostomygin's growing awareness of his surroundings. The characters take different approaches to coping with the horror of battle, and Ermakov reveals each in turn as ineffective against a morally destructive war. Kostomygin and Oparin obviously fail in their attempts to find an escape; and Ermakov does not spare the ranking members of the unit: the captain, Salikhov, and Shvarev. The captain represents a father-figure to his men, one whose commands they obey: 'Hey, no sleeping!' (93), or 'Smoke' (95). His use of slang also reassures them in a dangerous situation: '"Sanych", he said to the radio operator, "let's call the lads back from the village and hand them over to the 'coachmen' -- have them bring up the 'carriages'".'

(95)[20] He also sits down on a rock, takes out a comb, and after removing his panama hat begins to arrange his hair in an unhurried manner. He then meditatively blows on the comb to clean it, and carefully places it back in a case. The comb adds a slightly absurd but very human touch of vanity amidst the dust and grime of combat, a reminder of lost civilizing routines. Indeed, other characteristics mark the captain as a sort of ringmaster in this otherwise dark circus. Shvarev respects the captain's sagacity: 'Uncle Vitya knows what he's doing... Now don't you worry, he knows his business.' (99) The captain represents whatever faith exists for the soldiers in an established order. He also injects levity into the otherwise grim business of house-to-house fighting. By the end, however, the captain himself is upset at the losses sustained by the unit, and shows none of his former humour. Deserting his troops, as it were, the captain arrives too late to save Kostomygin and Oparin from the clutches of their sergeant. This absence indirectly reinforces the isolation and despair Kostomygin feels at the story's end as he contemplates a universe without a centre.

Salikhov is the favourite of the entire company, but his winning qualities also will prove to be ineffective in this situation. His grey eyes are set in an 'unbelievably tender' face, with skin unaccountably pale after his having been stationed in Afghanistan for some months. He plays the guitar, possesses a melodious voice, and is envied for his lovely girlfriend. He is regarded as an intellectual because of his love for books, but is no aesthete: instead, he is well-built and an excellent athlete, and skilled in martial arts. Kostomygin senses a genuine spiritual and intellectual kinship with Salikhov, which reinforces the sense that Salikhov has the potential to become an inspirational leader. Yet he too becomes involved in events which he cannot control. He makes the apparently fatal error of refusing to check the identity of the Afghan

[20]This use of nineteenth-century terminology finds a certain kinship with examples of current American military jargon. For instance, a request from pilot to engineer to increase fuel flow on a multi-engined jet aircraft can be phrased in terms of 'throwing more coals on the fire', evoking the steam era of locomotives. Perhaps this reflects a desire to simplify, and thus control, one's environment; or it reflects the desire for continuity with the past (as opposed to the complementary identification with the strength of technological advances pointing toward the future), thus drawing strength from forebears who are legendary and therefore stronger than one's contemporaries.

'women' crouching in the room. The other men fall under his spell, assuming that Salikhov's prowess on the athletic field reveals superior judgement in all things. This mistake leads him to commit murder at the very end of the story, when he feels compelled to take the life of the prisoner whom Oparin refuses to kill.

Shvarev is the only character to emerge relatively unscathed from the events in 'Baptism', but only because he is portrayed as an ally of violence. He is identified with his automatic weapon. An effective and fearless combat soldier, he has cut notches in his rifle stock to record the number of enemies he has killed, and this detail accurately forecasts the terrible influence he will exert -- not only on the lives of the enemy soldiers he captures, but also on his own troops. Ermakov uses the rifle stock to symbolize a character who is not only emotionally excited but also intellectually content with considerations no higher than those directly related to killing. Indeed, with his nose for blood, Shvarev is the first to detect the sounds of the approaching Soviet infantry company in anticipation of battle (100).

In the dialogue between Shvarev and the captain, humour is used to underscore subsequent events in the plot which will later turn tragic. At first, the captain jokes about the failure of the mujahedin caravan to appear in the village, and the unlikelihood of having missed them: 'Well, maybe if they have jet-powered camels' (95). During the subsequent meeting with the Sarandoy militia, however, the captain becomes apprehensive about the information obtained from the Afghan officer (98). Likewise, Salikhov's martial arts skills are the pretext for a good-natured rejoinder from the captain ('And where to notch kills? -- For you? On your heels and fists') (95-96), but later in the story Salikhov will use his skills in a terrible murder. And the captain also pokes fun at Shvarev with a reference to Dracula (96), drawing a prescient comparison to a monster who not only kills but forces others to do his bidding as well. This superstructure of humour, however, only covers a foundation of unrelieved tragedy.

The prelude to the fall from innocence is a backdrop of alienation from one's surroundings. In several of his stories Ermakov uses the same image: the forbidding outer appearance of houses combined with the inviting hint of garden to be glimpsed

within the walls. 'The grey walls -- both tall and low; the grey towers, round and faceted; the grey houses, square and rectangular boxes with narrow windows; and the very green, very dreamlike gardens' (99).[21] This suggests a native life inaccessible to the invading army, heightened by the imperceptible transformation of the village from a peaceful scene with chickens strutting about and an old man driving before him a humpbacked cow, to a suddenly vacant and hostile battleground (100). It is as though the village is a live organism aware of a threat, marshalling its strength to strike back. Indeed, the quarter from which the subsequent attack comes is deliberately left unclear, to underscore the mystery of the labyrinth formed by village alleyways and the attendant anxiety of invaders searching for hidden threats.[22]

Ermakov relates the action from Kostomygin's point of view, allowing his hero's observations to advance the plot or fill in the background, while at the same time never giving the reader the benefit of perspective. The village children are carefully detailed, but only as if through the binoculars of a distant observer: 'here and there, now and again curious children would show themselves, craning their necks to stare at the dust-covered machines of the unbelievers' (99). In similar fashion, Ermakov describes the speech and thoughts of the mujahedin prisoners, but only as a conjecture on the part of the hero:

> [The prisoners] sweated inside the transport, trembled when the vehicle flew over a pothole or scraped its belly on a rock, and they prayed to Allah to remove all mines from their path. Or maybe they prayed that everybody -- the hated infidels, and they themselves -- would be blasted to kingdom come by a powerful explosion. (102)

The image of the soldier, the 'unbeliever', as outsider is reinforced; he may look into the walled garden, but he may not enter.

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[21]The English word 'paradise' is derived from the Persian word for 'walled enclosure'. See reference to Kenneth Clark, Landscape into Art, in L. M. O'Toole, Structure, Style, and Interpretation in the Russian Short Story (London: Yale UP, 1982) 143.

[22]'Instead of the near straight streets, open gardens and above all evidence of central planning typical of the European city, one encounters in the Muslim city a "...tangle of blocks badly ventilated by a labyrinth of twisted alleys and dark courts, the low houses endlessly broken up along their little courtyards." The blind alleys and "L"-shaped entrances to private homes can be justified as functionally useful in defence and concealment of private life.' See Jay C. Mumford, 'Islamic Responses to Western Contact', Naval War College Review 33.6 (November-December 1980): 65.

Kostomygin's fall begins as the fighting breaks out. In contrast to the opening section of 'Baptism' when the hero's physical sensations brought pleasure, the same odours now produce nausea. His disgust and fear are described:

> He was sick of standing and firing, and then bending down, and again standing, pressing the trigger and again hiding behind the wall. Such heat, and the stink of powder and flower blossoms, and his ears were ringing, and his throat was parched, while the machine-gunner fired and fired, and there was and would be no end to it, while Medved' probably was still grimacing and writhing in the vehicle, and there was and would be no end to it ... (101)

The tension is kept high by a description of a house-to-house search. Shvarev leads the way through wooden doors, then through a two-story house in which are discovered women and children hiding in a corner. Kostomygin feels as if the earth is trembling beneath his feet, and is surprised to see his legs shaking. Shvarev must give him directions on where to shoot, and then rein him in lest he expend all his ammunition in a brief frenzy of firing. Kostomygin fires at open windows, each time missing a sniper who is hopping between openings (101). Ermakov follows this suspense with brutal realism, as Salikhov and another soldier lead two mujahedin prisoners out of the building. Shvarev approaches the first prisoner, a 'hook-nosed wiry fellow with wide shoulders', and hits him on the chin with the butt of his rifle. The second fellow cries out in panic, then wraps his chalma over his face as if to block out the terror.[23] The turning point of the story is reached when, confronted with Shvarev's order to shoot the prisoner, Kostomygin thinks, 'It's disgusting when in such heat one feels so cold' (102). This physical reaction to the enormity of his impending crime is Kostomygin's subconscious realization that he has fallen, that in this inverted moral order he has been 'baptized' by war. To underscore this moral fall, the reader never sees the actual crime; it occurs in Kostomygin's memory, to emphasize the horror rather than the action itself. Kostomygin also remembers that Oparin, when confronted with the same order, had begged to be let off, to which the reply was, 'Let off? To go where? Home to Mum?' (103) This reveals sudden self-awareness of his previous state of innocence. In an

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[23]The chalma is a cloth wrapping used by Afghan men as headgear, and also as an item of utility clothing.

evocation of childhood fairy tales, and a reversal of the time image used earlier, Kostomygin 'wanted somehow to fall asleep, to fall into such a slumber that he might not wake in a thousand years nor ever remember anything' (102). This desire to forget is foreshadowed by the earlier wish for immortality (99), which now becomes a suicide wish. Thus Kostomygin rides inside the BMP, not caring about the danger from mines. And unlike the rest of his crew, he sits with the prisoners, as if all pretence for any putative moral differentiation from the enemy has been lost.

Dedovshchina forms a backdrop to the moral choice confronting Kostomygin. The discussion during the meal (95-96) recalls the campfire scene in 'Simply Autumn' with its attendant humiliations, but in 'Baptism' (as in 'Winter in Afghanistan') a short exposition follows (97). Structurally, this forms a special subsection; it is the longest paragraph in the story, and while it undoubtedly serves the didactic function of illuminating this problem for the reading public, it seems to fulfill an organic role within the story. Ermakov documents the range of victims' reactions to dedovshchina in the form of a dialectic (discussed below), and the results inform the moral destruction of his main character. Ermakov's dedovshchina is to the army what Solzhenitsyn's labour camps are to Soviet society: a moral, physical, and spiritual testing ground in which a person's inner strengths and weaknesses are revealed.

This dialectic includes as thesis the beliefs of Krylov, a soldier who has refused even the most innocuous demands of the 'granddads'. He is then methodically crushed by being forced to 'live by the regulations' (97). Of course, to observe every single army regulation is 'beyond human endurance, and no private, general, or even marshal can do it'. When the other junior troops refuse to support his accusations against the 'granddads' out of fear of reprisal, Krylov ends up on permanent duty in the unit pigsty, his only a companion a mule which carries barrels of slop for his master. In his appeal to the letter of the law, Krylov resembles the ex-naval captain Buinovsky in 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich'.[24] Buinovsky ends up in the glasshouse after

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[24] Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, 'Odin den' Ivana Denisovicha', Novyi mir 11 (1962): 8-74.

appealing to the higher code of ethics and behaviour upon which Soviet Communism rests (21).

The antithesis of this dialectical process is the tactic chosen by Oparin, a soldier who has surrendered to his overlords. He is the only 'son' who is still willing to wash clothing for the senior troops in the hope that he will not be mistreated. But this is disastrous behaviour, since the soldiers no more desire a sycophant than an ungovernable rebel in their midst. Hence the disgust which Oparin elicits, not only from his peers (the hero calls him 'a cow') but also among the senior troops. 'Ugh, you maggot! You crawling insect. What sort of a reconnaissance soldier are you? You should be chased away just like Krylov' (97). Like Fetyukov, another of Solzhenitsyn's characters in 'Ivan Denisovich', Oparin occupies the lowest rung of the hierarchy, but he lacks Fetyukov's guile. Instead of stealing leftover food from other people's bowls as Fetyukov does in the labour camp, Oparin does the opposite to curry favour. He tries to give his food to the senior troops, and thereby loses the respect of his compatriots.[25]

Steering a middle course in this dialectic is Kostomygin. He asserts his independence (refusing to get a cigarette for a 'granddad'); but he also comes to heel if the pressure increases sufficiently when he submits to the order to produce a pack of cigarettes for his superiors (98). He thinks: 'Krylov couldn't recognize moderation, neither could Oparin ... Yes, they occupied opposite poles, Oparin and Krylov, and it was necessary to keep away from both extremes' (98). At the story's conclusion, however, it is clear that Kostomygin's attempted synthesis has also failed; he murders on Shvarev's order. Guilt is a central theme in Ermakov's work, and in this tale there

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[25]Giving one's food away seems to be a distortion of the idea summed up in various expressions found in Russian for a durable friendship, namely, 'sharing food from the same bowl' (in this case 'odnokashniki'). If the characters in Solzhenitsyn's book are used as an indicator, neither Krylov nor Oparin will survive. In 'Ivan Denisovich', Fetyukov, who is Oparin's counterpart, is one type ('the bowl-licker', 63) whom Shukhov's squad leader says will not survive, even though Shukhov disagrees (9). The intractable Buinovsky, Krylov's counterpart, is likewise led away to solitary confinement and probable death at the conclusion of the story (69).

appears to be no salvation possible for Kostomygin. The atmosphere in 'Baptism' is one of unremitting despair.

Combat is again the subject of '"Unit X Conducted Training Exercises" 1981'.[26] During an attack on a mujahedin mountain stronghold, a Soviet company overruns an outlying gun emplacement with the loss of the Russian commander, while leaving only one badly wounded rebel alive. Vitya, the sergeant in command of the three soldiers who remain at the emplacement, forbids one of his men, Grashchenkov, to bandage the wounded prisoner. He then forestalls further argument by shooting the prisoner in reprisal for the Soviet commander's death. The detachment subsequently comes under counter-attack by rebels, and the Russians are eliminated one by one. The sergeant gives one grenade to his sole surviving compatriot, and with another he kills himself. The story concludes as the last remaining soldier, rather than committing suicide like his sergeant, surrenders to the advancing mujahedin.

The contrast between capitulation and death is central to the story. Being taken prisoner is clearly a terrible fate for any combatant in this war; Ermakov describes the fate of a Russian earlier taken captive, his remains barely recognizable.[27] In this theatre of war, the author propounds an axiom doubtlessly familiar to Russian soldiers for centuries: 'There can be nothing worse than Eastern captivity.'[28] This alleged oriental ruthlessness partially explains the sergeant's suicide; at all costs he will avoid capture by men who, he believes, 'can kill slowly, a teaspoon of death every hour' (92). The detonation of his grenade is also an act of bravery, for which the Soviet reader would be conditioned by the well-publicized award in 1984 of the title of Hero of the Soviet Union to Nikolai Chepik for the same heroic deed, to choose but one example.[29] But the soldier who begs for his life in this story presents a great contrast to factual yet

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[26]Ermakov, '"N--skaya chast' provela ucheniya" 1981', Znamya 10 (1989): 90-95.
[27]The reprisal killing of captives occurs also in 'Kreshchenie' and 'Znak zverya', underscoring the lack of mercy shown to prisoners. This motif, perhaps based on Ermakov's own experience, continually resurfaces in his fiction; it seems to represent acute moral crisis.
[28]Even air force pilots, pictured here as a privileged segment of military society floating above the conflict, receive credit for risking capture after bailing out or crash landing.
[29]See Gennady Bocharov, 'Pole zhizni', Literaturnaya gazeta 9 January 1985: 10.

propagandistic accounts of Heroes of the Soviet Union falling on their grenades as the fictional sergeant has done. To highlight this contrast, Ermakov concludes '"Unit X"' with the spectacle of a Russian uttering strange sounds in an alien tongue. The author translates the soldier's broken Farsi ('Dust! Enough! Don't shoot! Mondana boshchi ... khub esti!') in a footnote to the text: 'Dust -- friend; mondana boshchi khub esti -- traditional Afghan greeting' (95).

This contrast between self-sacrifice and capitulation highlights a theme which is central to the story: the discrepancy between propagandistic reportage and the reality of war. Ermakov calls his story 'a training exercise' and puts the words in quotes, probably to make an ironic reference to a typical military news report in the first years of the war. As has been shown in Chapter Two, these accounts omitted all references to actual combat -- in which men were fighting, dying, and in some cases surrendering -- and instead spoke euphemistically of 'training exercises'. The opening sentence, with its specificity of location, even resembles a newspaper dateline, but this time an accurate one: 'Day and night, the battalions stormed the Iskapol' mountains in Ghazni Province' (90).[30] Ermakov also subordinates lyrical description to a telegraphic account of combat operations. Lush descriptions of bucolic nature found in other stories are replaced here with momentary nocturnal silhouettes of ravines illuminated by flares and enveloped in the smell of gunpowder (90). And where in 'Simply Autumn' the fall season plays an important role in setting the lyrical tone, the same season is now mentioned only briefly to mark its physical effect on the combatants: 'it was autumn, the sun grew quite warm during the day, while at night the air was icy, and the soldiers quickly became tired after attacks' (91).[31]

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[30]This location, incidentally, is the same as in Ermakov's stories 'Blagopoluchnoe vozvrashchenie', 'Zheltaya gora', and the novel 'Znak zverya', and quite possibly has an autobiographical basis.
[31]This stylistic choice of stark reportage in 'N--skaya' does not entirely remove Ermakov's metaphoric impulse. For example, realization of the proximity of death in combat is presented as a contrast between heat and cold: 'Their faces were hot, but the pit of their stomachs was cold.' (91) This physical symptom of fear compares with the moment of moral capitulation in 'Kreshchenie'. And the colour orange from the illumination flares symbolizes death. In the opening night scene, the flares dropped from helicopters cast an orange glow over the advancing Soviet infantry, an indirect reference to impending danger (90). When the mujahed prisoner is later murdered, Ermakov uses this colour in direct association with death: 'The soldiers looked into the orange face with the torn mouth, gouged

In the same vein, Ermakov portrays human participation in combat with a flat finish devoid of emotional texture. 'One of the scalding streaks cut into the running man and he collapsed. It was the company commander; he retched blood and doubled up, then grew still. He was dead' (91). This laconic description is quite different in style to the extended monologues spoken by the mortally wounded heroes of Vladimir Rybakov or Aleksandr Prokhanov. Another passage describing the storming of an enemy gun emplacement is related virtually without adjectives.

The rebels were losing the heights, their heavy machine gun had been silenced, and now they were firing from rifles and automatic weapons... After pausing, the lieutenant was the first to storm over the top, drawing his soldiers with him. Behind the boulders was a level area where a machine gun nest stood, and around which lay empty metal canisters, and four bodies destroyed by shell fragments. A fifth figure was crawling away. The lieutenant ran over and kicked him, and the rebel turned over on his back and raised his bloody arms ... (91)

Ermakov de-emphasizes characterization. His descriptions of the soldiers' feelings are attributed to the collective 'machine-gunners' rather than a single individual. For example, their love of vodka: 'On the other hand, you become a human being again for half an hour, and there is no boredom or fear' (92). There is conflict between Grashchenkov and the sergeant: Grashchenkov sympathizes with the wounded prisoner because of wounds he himself sustained just after arrival in Afghanistan, while the sergeant seeks only revenge for the company commander's death (92). Unlike 'Baptism', however, there is no examination of either protagonist's thoughts or emotions. Ermakov does not inform the reader, for example, of whether the sergeant recognizes any irony in his vain attempt to bandage Grashchenkov's mortal wound after he has prevented Grashchenkov from doing the same with the Afghan prisoner. In any case, Grashchenkov, a central character, is one of the first soldiers to perish in the subsequent fight. The two remaining soldiers, one of whom figures prominently in surrender, are not even named. Instead, actions rather than thoughts form the bulk of the narrative (93).

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eyes and broken nose' (93). It is employed again when Grashchenkov dies: 'He looked into the orange sky and became silent' (94).

Internal characterization is not completely absent; in fact, Ermakov portrays the thoughts of the doomed Afghan prisoner. To show motivation for combatants on each side of the war, Ermakov presents an indirect contrast between the Islamic conception of blissful paradise and the Russian notion of heaven on earth. The dying Afghan warrior's vision of heaven includes dark-eyed maidens attending the faithful as they sip fragrant tea (93). The Russian machine-gunners' conception of the houri, however, is embodied in Tanya, given an earthy description by Ermakov. In contrast to a perfumed lotus flower is the 'aroma of Tanya's perfume and perspiration' (91). The average Russian soldier also clearly prefers his mug of vodka to the Muslim cup of tea (92). Thus, the contrast between Russian and Islamic cultural affinities is reflected in the fates each side imagines to be waiting after the battle, but the Muslim achieves his goal through death, whereas death means the end of any hope for a Russian's earthly paradise. This comparison demonstrates the unequal motivations for Afghans fighting for their country, and Russians far from their native homeland. Interestingly, with the omniscient narrator's account of the Afghan warrior's dream of paradise, Ermakov paves the way for a sympathetic, fully-realized characterization of an enemy soldier (93). As noted earlier, Vyacheslav Kuritsyn, the Soviet critic, believes that Ermakov achieves this goal.[32] As it stands, however, the mujahed soldier remains objectified as 'other'. The dream merely allows the reader to identify the character as a 'typical' fanatical Muslim who is anaesthetized against death by (Ermakov's version of) the Islamic conception of the afterlife. Thus, Ermakov relegates the individual internal conflicts of his entire cast of characters to the background, and concentrates instead on the fate awaiting them all.

In yet another striking contrast to propagandistic accounts, this story contains one of the first positive assessments of Afghan mujahedin combat capability to be found in Soviet fiction. Ermakov gives credit to the rebel forces for assembling an effective logistical base and mustering a spirited defence. 'The rebels were solidly

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[32]Kuritsyn 218.

ensconced in the caves and grottoes. In these mountains they had a formidable base, and suffered no shortages of water, food, medicine, or ammunition. They fought ably and with great daring' (90). By removing ideological filters from the evaluation of a bitter enemy, Ermakov eliminates the paradox of Soviet soldiers fighting valiantly and sacrificing their lives against an enemy who is alleged to be cowardly, disorganized, and poorly equipped. Instead, he shows that all branches of the Soviet armed forces -- infantrymen, pilots, even staff personnel -- were subject to attack by a clever and capable guerrilla force operating with no recognizable fronts. Ermakov even points out an infantryman's perennial worry about misdirected friendly artillery support: '-- Now the artillery will hammer them,-- said one of the machine gunners in a rasping voice. -- 'As long as the fools don't take us out with them' (92). Both sides in the conflict are seen in attack and retreat, both sides exhibiting human frailties amidst the fog of war. It is precisely these elements -- of courage on the part of the enemy, of fear ascribed to one's countrymen -- that were missing in Soviet reportage and fiction during the early years of the war.

On the surface, 'Blagopoluchnoe vozvrashchenie' ('Safe Return'), the last story to be discussed in this chapter, is the simple tale of a veteran making his way from hospital in Afghanistan to his home in Russia.[33] Ermakov presents this story in terms of clearly delineated plot and characterization, much as he eliminates ambiguity from the previously discussed '"Unit X"'. Ermakov divides Orshev's story into sections like areas on a terrain map, each punctuated with a particular obstacle to be overcome.[34] The protagonist returns from hospital to his barracks tent still recovering from fever; joins a motorized column the morning after defeating his rival for the prestigious lower bunk bed; travels without mishap through enemy territory to Kabul; and after a short

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[33]Ermakov, 'Blagopoluchnoe vozvrashchenie'.

[34]From internal evidence it seems that Orshev's battalion is stationed near Ghazni, which is also the location of the story previously discussed. The Urganskoe Gorge (156) is approximately 120 miles south of Kabul, near the border with Pakistan, a region which saw intense guerrilla activity due to the mujahedin supply corridor which traversed it. It was also the post for a large Soviet special forces contingent, according to Nemeshaev, personal interview.

trip to a transfer point, he is fortunate to find a seat on the plane which will take him home.

But I would suggest that the apparent simplicity of 'Safe Return' conceals a subtext which again hints at the Soviet soldier's plight in Afghanistan as a general theme. Indeed, the general characteristics of Ermakov's story outlined above do not entirely hold. The opening section is distinguished in several ways from the straightforward presentation which later predominates, and only after the reader finishes the story is the initial dream sequence revealed as an exceptional feature in the narrative. The opening dream portrays Orshev's subconscious conflict about his role in the war; his effort to return safely to a pristine spiritual condition is represented by images of women, children, and a festive homecoming. Instead of attaining his goal, however, Orshev participates in the imaginary rape of an old woman, murders children, destroys a festive table, and feasts with corpses. These monstrous images of death, including his own worm-filled lungs and the 'granite monument' of, perhaps, his own gravestone, document a loss of innocence which the hero has experienced in Afghanistan. The opening sentence forecasts the futility of Orshev's attempt to save himself: the imaginary smirking general tells him that he will now be in the regiment 'forever' (156). In this feverish hallucination, Orshev's subconscious is telling him that there will be no safe spiritual return to innocence.

The opening section, taken as a whole, additionally disrupts the aforementioned pattern of straightforward narrative by virtue of being chronologically marked: it describes a circle in time instead of a unilinear progression as in the rest of the story. First, the hero suffers a violent nightmare while recuperating in a field hospital. This hallucination is followed by an account of an earlier vision which had ripened during his two years in Afghanistan, the hero's naïve wish for a perfect homecoming with his comrades. The narration then approaches the present by recalling the hero's more recent attempt to overcome the heat during his last combat patrol into the mountains. Remaining submerged in a cold mountain stream has resulted in pneumonia, spoils the chance for the homecoming with his friends by putting him in hospital, and has brought

about the feverish nightmare with which the story begins (157). The opening sequence uses cyclical chronology to reinforce the title's idea of a return. But just as the theme suggested by the title is contradicted by the opening dream, the opening section contradicts the subsequent linear narrative by placing the hero no closer to home at the end of the first section than he was at the beginning. These contradictions, reinforced with additional subtextual elements discussed below, imbue the story with an ambiguous quality which reflects the author's subversive view of the Afghan War.

Orshev's characterization also suggests that the protagonist indeed has cares beyond simply returning home. In fact, Orshev withdraws into a protective cocoon once he is released from hospital. He shuns the bathhouse attendant, preferring to stay for the night in the tent which has been home for two years, but where he has no remaining friends (157). And after arriving in Kabul, when the captain jests at his expense, Orshev's response is resentful silence (162). This silence is not born of necessity; after all, both the commander and the bathhouse attendant treat him in friendly fashion, and both offer him hospitality for the night. Moreover, there is very little actual conversation throughout the story; the sparse reported speech in the barracks tent, for example, is merely a prelude to the fight (158). During the ride to Kabul, Orshev prefers the driver to be as uncommunicative as possible, at one point even telling him to stop whistling: 'Chief, change the record' (161). At every turn, Orshev withdraws from his surroundings.

This withdrawal is further reflected by the author's landscape descriptions. In a story with little dialogue, Ermakov seems to use these descriptions as mirrors which reflect the hero's emotional condition. A description of the dusty army camp, for example, reveals Orshev's weariness.

> They sat on the [bathhouse] porch, sipped tea, nibbled hard tack and sugar and peered out over the little regimental city. The tents, the wooden sentry boxes, the latrines, dustbins, mess tents, the headquarters and the commissary store, the officers' quarters, the parade ground and supply dumps -- all were grey from the dust and the sun. (157)

A village panorama suggests the cultural chasm between rural Afghans and Soviet soldiers, as well as the alienation of Orshev, who senses the rhythm of life from which he is cut off.

> All around lay the steppe with little inclines the colour of lead, and tiny ridges along the horizon. In the lifeless desert an occasional village was outlined in green. Sometimes these settlements came to the very edge of the highway. They were cheerless gatherings of mudbrick dwellings surrounded by high walls; the houses, the walls and the wooden gates were all grey and lacklustre. The people -- men in turbans, cloaks and wide trousers, women in dark loose overalls -- occasionally brought timid life to the sun-drenched alleys and cramped squares. But beyond the courtyard walls overflowed lush gardens-fresh, verdant, gentle gardens... (160)

Furthermore, in keeping with Orshev's intentional withdrawal from his environment, all the descriptions are drawn from an outsider's viewpoint. The Afghans themselves are a mirage, whether distant (162) or proximate (163); in any case they remain out of direct contact with the hero. Appropriately, Orshev has one last chance to view the capital city -- from the air. He foregoes the opportunity, however, seemingly weary from looking at his surroundings from a distance (164). Ermakov thus uses his descriptions to illuminate the protagonist's feelings of isolation, but also employs point of view to increase the sense of alienation.

The war itself is described from a distance so that no enemy soldiers appear, emphasizing the psychological effect of the fighting. Guerrilla warriors necessarily avoid direct engagement with a technologically superior force, and the resultant disorientation of their opponents is effectively portrayed in this story. Far more vivid than any actual attack is the intimation of danger continually hovering over the convoy, and the oppressive effect on the soldiers of this constant anxiety. For example, the casual mention of the Alsatian canine patrol used to sniff out hidden booby traps at the bridge underscores the omnipresent threat of hidden mines to the convoy (162). The macabre scene of the bus destroyed by a mine is portrayed after the dead and wounded have been removed, in order to emphasize emotional loss among surviving Afghans (161). Characteristic of this story, the author chooses not to tell the reader directly how his Russian characters react to the sight, but simply describes the scene, expending no more narrative time than it would take to drive past the scene of the explosion. Even

the mortar attack on the camp near Kabul is more a mental phenomenon than anything real. While the new troops are terrified of the real incoming shells, Orshev transforms the attack into a 'movie' in his mind. This imaginary reconstruction includes the mujahedin mortar crew performing its task, and the massacre of everyone in the tent, including himself (163). As in the hospital hallucination, this second dream illustrates the psychological casualties of war.[35]

The hero's wish to be done with the war is revealed in his sudden perception of time's deceleration, as people present him with various temptations to prevent his long-awaited departure. The commander tells him that a helicopter will be available 'any day now' to take him to Kabul, but Orshev is apprehensive: 'But what was the meaning of "any day now"? That could be tomorrow or the day after, in a week or two.' Next, the bathhouse attendant presents him with a choice: 'I wouldn't go. Better to wait a month for a chopper. Why not stay here, spend the night at my place...' (157). The subsequent offer of anasha, presumably with its artificially induced deceleration of time's passage, promises only weariness, and hence holds no enticement. In the camp outside Kabul, it is the captain's turn to dissuade the hero from continuing on his journey. 'Listen, the driver's been overworked, why not get an early start tomorrow... Where are you hurrying to?' (162) Orshev likewise turns down this last inducement to forget, even temporarily, his priority of returning. He is already aware of the truth in the captain's remark, '...Well, fellows, life has left you behind' (162). Those who are serving in Afghanistan find themselves on a wheel of time which revolves at a much slower pace from that of 'reality' back home. The lorry driver, for example, notes that six months is inconsequential, but the recently demobilized hero has other thoughts: 'Six months, that is, twenty-four weeks, or one hundred and eighty days -- and his jaw ached with tedium' (160). Like Odysseus on his homeward journey, Orshev is beset

[35]The human reaction to a state of constant danger, incidentally, is realistically handled, so that anxiety expresses itself not only as tension but also as monotony. For example, the driver maintains his repetitive whistling as if to underscore the ultimate banality of death along the highway. And Orshev, after receiving his four grenades like a security blanket, and sated after lunch, falls asleep for the second time in the cabin of the lorry while completing the last leg of the journey (161-62).

with obstacles that threaten to capture him forever. But he senses that should he succumb to temptation, as he did by swimming in the river, he will never escape.

Despite the theme of a 'successful homecoming', Ermakov's focus on the protagonist's health is another factor contributing to the vaguely oppressive atmosphere of 'Safe Return'. Descriptions of Orshev's physical malaise ('Orshev felt lazy, weak and listless') (157); ('His body felt weak') (164) are interwoven with reports of his morbid spiritual condition ('everything made him sick, he was even sick of anasha, sick to death of everything') (157); ('After two years he was tired of these army conversations') (160). The intersection of the physical and spiritual is suggested at the story's outset:

> Orshev peered up at the mattress springs of the top bunk and warily took stock of himself. Something wasn't right, maybe he really was still sick. Or was it the usual lethargy after an illness? (157)

The mysterious pain resurfaces at the story's conclusion as a reminder of a chronic condition.

> His body felt weak. He took a deep breath and felt a sharp pain in his back opposite the left lung. Or was it his heart? No, his heart was healthy... He simply hadn't recovered yet... But this damned feeling of weakness... (164)

As in Tolstoy's 'The Death of Ivan Ilyich' it is a pain whose exact cause or location cannot be identified, but which carries implications beyond the physical. This indeterminate sense of unease may be seen as a metaphor for the Soviet soldier's dilemma in Afghanistan. There are no disastrous losses in battle, yet there is a fundamental sense of defeat. After all, Orshev survives the war; he has not suffered crippling injury; and he is happy enough to cheer during his homeward flight.[36] But accompanying him on the plane from Kabul are coffins being sent home for burial, escorted by grim-visaged soldiers. The cargo of death serves as a potent image of defeat (164).

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[36] Indeed, as noted earlier, the story is called 'Kheppi end' in the anthology of Afghan War stories by L. Teplov 435-50.

In 'Safe Return', Ermakov shows that the goals of the individual have become separated to a critical extent from whatever political objectives the nation has proposed, and which degenerate to no more than personal survival and homecoming. Surviving one's tour of duty, as opposed to conquering the enemy, is implicitly presented as the ultimate goal of the regular soldier in Afghanistan. And in this venture Orshev is successful, just as General Gromov's well-orchestrated retreat across the Amu Darya in 1989 was painted as victory. Contradicting the thematic assumption of the title, however, Ermakov turns to a modernist overlay of psychological realism as manifested in the dream sequences to portray loss of innocence and defeat in war. This subtext of defeat is likewise revealed in various other elements of the story, including characterization, description, and perception of time. Orshev's physical discomfort, the only problem that seems to occupy his attention, seems to betoken a spiritual sickness for his nation as well.

From an analysis of these six stories, it is evident that Ermakov's fiction tends toward the lyrical, wherein the author experiments with narrative time through the use of dreams. Plot is de-emphasized, as are descriptions of the actual fighting -- although Ermakov is capable of advancing his narratives through laconically described battlefield action. Instead, the stories focus on the protagonist's spiritual condition. Ermakov's composite hero is an introverted intellectual whose naïvety before the war results in his moral enlightenment, and disillusionment or collapse. From these aspects of Ermakov's fiction, the impression is created that his portrayal of the war in Afghanistan differs radically from that of the Great Patriotic War in earlier standard literature, and from early Afghan War literature as well. Instead, Ermakov's fiction, and the characterization of his protagonists, seem to have roots in the same traditions that fostered Bulat Okudzhava's anti-war novella Good luck, Schoolboy! Ermakov plays down the 'platoon' story, emphasizing the inner life of the individual instead of the outer life of the collective. In fact, just as the collective previously served as a symbol for the seedbed of all that was good in Soviet society, in Ermakov's universe the

collective now manifests itself on a small scale as dedovshchina, and on a grand scale, as the destructiveness of war. His literature reanimates the legacy of Soviet dissident fiction about combat and its effect on the human spirit.

Chapter Eight

Oleg Ermakov (Part Two)

Like the works previously analyzed, four of the five stories discussed in this chapter describe combat. They are all distinguished, however, by Ermakov's exploration of the war's resonance within the domestic Soviet milieu. If the story depicts a soldier who is killed in battle, Ermakov explores the effect of the death on relatives. If the hero survives, the author shows how he emerges from battle spiritually transformed -- and wounded -- to re-enter society in yet another struggle for survival.

Ermakov divides his very short story 'Mars i soldat' ('Mars and the Soldier') into five numbered sections which depict alternating scenes of an old man in Moscow and a soldier, perhaps his son, in Afghanistan.[1] Section One opens as the old man, in a pensive mood, surveys the capital city from his flat after the first snowfall of the season. Section Two switches to the mountains of Afghanistan, where a Russian soldier named Sorokoputov is lying in captivity inside a cave, his hands bound, his mind delirious from hunger and thirst. In the third section, the old man reads a lyric poem which describes a blossoming cherry tree. The setting then moves back to Afghanistan, where Sorokoputov, hoping for rescue, is instead dragged from the cave by Afghan mujahedin and summarily executed. The fifth and final section concludes with the old man shedding tears over a poem in which the poet affirms that he will be remembered by his native Rus'.

This short story places the death of a Russian soldier in a poetic context formed by Sergei Esenin's verses which the old man reads in Moscow. The scene in the capital city is shrouded in snow, presaging death; the elderly man's bleak thoughts and frail physical state contribute to an atmosphere of resignation and impending oblivion. 'He had a thought that this first snow would also be the last. The old man chased the thought away, this black thought about white snow' (109). The third section continues

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1Oleg Ermakov, 'Mars i soldat', Znamya 10 (1989): 107-10.

this theme when the man reads the opening line of a favourite poem, 'The cherry blossoms scatter like snow...'[2] Later, his memory presents a possible variant: 'Is it the snow which looks like cherry blossoms, or is it a cherry tree which appears covered in snow?' (108) That is, he now finds himself wondering if Esenin's 1910 lyric homage to spring might not actually be an image of winter and death. Yet 'Mars and the Soldier' concludes with tears and a requiem for the dead soldier in verse form taken from the first stanza of Esenin's 1924 poem 'In Memory of Bryusov': 'We are dying,/Departing into silence and gloom./But I know--/Rus' will not forget us' (110).[3] The text reaffirms the power of the poetic imagination to inform reality, no matter how terrible, and to salvage meaning from an otherwise hopeless situation. Perhaps in consequence of the enormity of his situation, Sorokoputov uses his imagination to retreat from reality. Despite capture, he foresees a miraculous rescue: '...and suddenly he will hear shouts of "Hurrah!", the heavy stone will be moved aside, and swift, sure hands will remove him from this crypt' (108). In his blissful dream while sleeping in the cave, he falls into a river which transports him to freedom; he is buoyed up by the warm current, drifting under a bright sun past flowers and greenery, evoking images similar to those found in Esenin's early poem.[4] Upon awakening, the hero realizes the basis for the dream was an actual location:

> Toward the end of May he was fishing with a friend in the Dnepr, it was hot, and they went swimming, while in the sky seagulls drifted, storks and herons soared. Having bathed, they lay on the sandy spit of land, on the hot yellow sand. In the evening they sat about the camp fire, drank tea and listened as the pike splashed. At night the rains came, and in the morning around their tent the sweetbriar had bloomed. (109)

This recollection mirrors the scene in Ermakov's 'Simply Autumn' wherein the protagonist describes the forest, evoking his homeland as saviour.[5] In 'Mars' the

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2Sergei Esenin, 'Syplet cheremukha snegom', Sobranie stikhotvorenii, vol.1 (Leningrad: Biblioteka vsemirnoi literatury, 1926) 30.

3Esenin, 'Pamyati Bryusova', Sobranie stikhotvorenii, vol. 4, 100.

4By coincidence, it also echoes the central event of the lyric war story 'An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge', set during the American Civil War. Ambrose Bierce describes a hanged man's miraculous escape from the noose and his journey down river to return home. In fact these events are merely a dream which occurs during the last moment of the doomed hero's life.

5Ermakov, 'Prosto byla osen'' 57.

dream culminates with birds hovering over him like a protecting mother: 'Low over the water flew ungainly birds with feminine eyes, and they brushed him with their wings, and he laughed...' (109). Ermakov presents the birds as a feminine image of goodness and salvation protecting the hero from a tragic plight. These episodes all underscore the hero's efforts to believe in an ultimate salvation; Sorokoputov's dream uses the comforting image of Christ's resurrection. He even looks 'hopefully' into the eyes of his captor moments before his murder (109).

But the calamity of war, romantically represented in the title, is ultimately inescapable. Sorokoputov's second dream of escape reveals his own subconscious fear of death in a symbolic nightmare: he is suspended over a dark river with hands tied, hanging by his teeth from a tree branch, and losing his teeth as he is precipitated into the dark waters below (108). Though the soldier never ceases in his increasingly difficult attempt to keep up his spirits, it is a vain effort. Ermakov uses dreams and the desperate hope of the protagonist to foreshadow an abrupt return to harsh reality.

But does the author ultimately propound the malevolence of an uncaring universe, similar to that found in 'Baptism'? Even though the soldier cannot be saved by his comrades, Ermakov implies that the hero is guaranteed salvation because he will be remembered by his countrymen. This theme is emphasized through Esenin's poetic text ('In Memory of Bryusov') at the story's conclusion (110). Indeed, 'Mars and the Soldier' echoes the idea of nation as sanctuary which is first expressed in 'Simply Autumn'. The opening backdrop of Moscow gives way to an evocation of the Dnepr River, culminating in the reference to Rus' in Esenin's poem. Furthermore, by bracketing the combat episodes (sections two and four) within the larger framework of lyrical introduction, interlude and conclusion (sections one, three and five), the author formally constructs a universe based on the subordination of events, no matter how tragic, to a higher reality determined by memory's interpretation of those events. This memory belongs to the nation, and so the story is a lyrical expression of patriotic feeling. Ermakov reaffirms that Russia (more specifically, the people of Russia, as signified in the poem by 'Rus''; as opposed to the state, which might have been

signified by 'Rossiya'[6]) will no more forget her sons who died in Afghanistan than she will forget the poetry of Valery Bryusov or Sergei Esenin.

Ermakov again turns his attention to the home front in 'Zanesennyi snegom dom' ('The Snow-Covered House'), but here he emphasizes the pain of loss rather than the possibility of salvation.[7] Ermakov's overall tendency to concentrate on the consequences of combat, rather than the actual fighting itself, finds its purest form in this story. Instead of interweaving scenes from the domestic front and the foreign battlefield, as in 'Mars' or 'Yellow Mountain', he eliminates the explicit depiction of the war and its combatants from the text.[8] Instead, the protagonist is a woman who waits in vain for the return of her husband, who has perished on the eve of his departure from Afghanistan. The author describes the woman's work day as a school teacher, observes her cleaning the house and preparing a meal, and records her expectations of joyful reunion intertwined with premonitions of misfortune. The last scene records the heroine opening an envelope which presumably contains notification of her husband's death. By dwelling on effect rather than cause, Ermakov uses the story's theme to explore the ways in which death is denied.

'The Snow-Covered House' opens with a general prologue establishing not only the time and place of the story, but the mood as well.[9] The time is the rainy season of late autumn just prior to first snowfall, a symbol which is connected with the soldier's expected arrival: 'People, trees, dogs and silent birds were waiting -- any day now the first snow would fall. And the woman awaited her man' (122). The setting is the interior of a woman's house, beyond which lie in successive orbits the garden, neighbourhood, city, church, and Afghanistan (122-23). Thus the reader is quickly introduced to the young woman's ever-widening universe, foreshadowing the ways in

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[6]Dominic Lieven, 'Reform Eras in Russian History', University of Oxford Lecture, 13 May 1991.
[7]Oleg Ermakov, 'Zanesennyi snegom dom', Znamya 10 (1989): 122-28.
[8]There is one seeming exception in 'Zanesennyi snegom dom', when the woman compares the scene in her house to that of her husband's tent in Afghanistan (125). But this image is formed within the mind of someone who has not been to Afghanistan.
[9]Terms of analysis such as general prologue (that is, broad background information contained in a story's text) and special prologue (particular background information about the protagonist) are taken from O'Toole 20-21.

which events in the distant east ultimately will affect every aspect of her life. Using snowfall as a symbol of death as in 'Mars and the Soldier', the first snow will coincide with the arrival of news that the woman's husband has been killed.

The subsequent special prologue details the protagonist's domestic and working life. In her entrance hall hangs a reproduction of Van Gogh's painting 'Red Vineyards at Arles', which depicts a man walking along a road winding through fields in which women harvest grapes. The main character takes note of this painting throughout the story, and her various reactions provide movement to the plot as she anticipates her husband's arrival. Prior to her husband's departure she had been indifferent to the vivid French landscape, but since receiving a letter from her husband describing the crimson leaves of an Afghan vineyard near a destroyed wall, she has become obsessed with the painting's meaning (124). Since her husband is obviously familiar with the painting, one might speculate whether Ermakov intended to make use of an identical association in the husband's mind through which he communicates his subconscious fears to his wife. In any case, by turns she is upset with the 'terrible scarlet brushstrokes' and the 'dark man' (123); in lightheaded anticipation she perceives the figure as carefree (126). In one instance she is merely contemptuous of the artist's efforts, and criticizes those who would exaggerate the significance of a simple scene showing a figure wandering a country lane (124). But the baseline to these vacillating reactions is a horrible fascination. The peasant, far from being a homeless wanderer, seems to her to be a messenger with a specific purpose (124). It is as if the dark figure becomes the herald of death -- and by implication, the women working in the vineyards have become widows of those fallen in Afghanistan. She finds herself drawn toward a window in her house which faces southeast, and through which is 'visible the street along which her man, who was fighting in the East, would come' (123). In the painting, the road bordering the vineyards is oriented east-west, the direction from which a herald would appear.[10] This picture of the messenger actually comes to life at

[10]Coincidentally, Van Gogh's paintings of this period, associated with his rift with Gauguin, are concerned with death. 'The Red Vineyard' (Arles, 1888) now hangs in the Pushkin Museum in

the end of the story: the young wife looks out of the window to see the postal delivery woman bringing the fateful letter. The wife thinks to herself, 'It's simply the postman bringing the latest newspaper', switching gender as if to match the man in the painting walking along the road. Also, instead of three previous references to the 'street' (123, 125) Ermakov now uses the word 'road' (128) to match the 'road' in Van Gogh's painting (128, 123).

Besides the painting, Ermakov seems to use an additional series of figuratively framed pictures to portray the woman's attempts to control her husband's fate. Each time she composes the desired 'picture', however, events hidden within the 'canvas' shatter the frame. For example, the heroine refashions her hair, ringing her pretty features in curls like an innocent bride celebrating the arrival of her betrothed (123), but her new curls inspire only lust in her male co-workers and enmity among the females. This includes the school director, a woman who -- in Ermakov's brief parody of the bureaucratic mentality -- immediately begins to promulgate a new regulation prohibiting the overt display of sexuality in the workplace (124). In another instance the young wife pauses to view herself in the mirror after her bath, wondering if her husband will find her attractive (125). But then she finds herself unconsciously peering beyond her reflection and into her imaginary reconstruction of a barracks tent in Afghanistan. Other episodes contain 'framed' scenes which, despite their subject, do nothing to forestall her husband's ultimate demise. She draws inspiration from the view through her window, from which is 'visible the onion dome of the ancient Church of St. John the Baptist, and it was pleasant to look at it, framed in the black limetree branches' (122). She also promises to light candles in front of a church icon (a framed portrait) if her husband returns safely (123). The envelope, containing notification of the man's death, and the letter box (resting in the 'dark crosswork of the wicker gate') containing this envelope also represent frames from which the truth will inevitably burst forth (128). Despite the woman's attempt to convince herself that the letter is a note from a

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Moscow and could have been viewed by the characters. See Hans Bronkhorst, Vincent Van Gogh (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1990): 97-99.

friend, it is actually a message summoning her to the local Military Commissariat where the imaginary framed picture in her mind will be destroyed.

In this context of impending disaster, Ermakov's protagonist attempts to forestall fate through prayer. Despite the ideology of official atheism which the young wife intellectually accepts and propounds at school ('she knew that there was no God, there were only chemical processes'), at home untutored prayers pour from her own lips like an uncontrollable geyser. 'God-God-God, loving and gracious, tender and gentle, loving God, I love You and beg of You, God-God-God' (123). By her own admission she has turned into a 'superstitious' woman after her husband's departure (123). As the next sentences reveal, she is indeed drawn ultimately toward superstition as the only form of spiritual ritual she knows how to practice. As if to draw her husband home by recreating the environment which existed prior to his departure, she refuses to wash the shirt he last wore at home, refrains from removing the detested painting from the wall because it is his favourite, and ritually cleans the house as if to cause his arrival as much as to anticipate the event (123, 124). When praying she faces east toward Afghanistan, emphasizing her perception of prayer as a physically transmitted energy, rather than an expression of spiritual communion (123). And the protagonist never mentions Afghanistan by name, either to herself or to her co-workers (they know only that 'her husband is serving somewhere in the army') since mention of the enemy's name might bring harm (125). Instead, Ermakov repeatedly uses the phrase 'fighting in the East' in indirect speech, as if the heroine is torn between recognition and denial of danger. In this story, Ermakov's protagonist has a distinctly utilitarian -- but nonetheless passionate -- approach to her situation which is magical, personal, and emotional, rather than religious, canonical, or intellectual. The woman's actions most closely resemble primitive contagious magic rather than religious prayer.[11]

Ermakov underscores the heroine's sense of approaching death by decelerating the narrative passage of time. The author details the events of one day after two years

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[11] In Moscow during the 1991 Orthodox Christmas, a Russian acquaintance remarked that the nation 'no longer knows how to celebrate religious holidays -- we must learn anew.'

of waiting (123-25); then advances ten days and stops again to describe the next twenty-four hour segment. After that, time continues in an unbroken stream, which seems to pass ever more slowly in the woman's perception (126). To emphasize this, Ermakov divides the last eighteen hours of the story into three brief sections, and the woman continually notes the time in two- and three-hour segments.

Ermakov uses one final technique to reinforce the plight of his protagonist. The characters of this story are not named, perhaps to point out the isolated aspect of suffering on the home front, where anonymous families anguished over the loss of relatives in a hidden war. Only one minor character is named: Boris Savel'evich, a Russian language teacher (123). This could be explained by the author's desire to focus on a man who, by virtue of his attraction to the heroine, presents a threat to her. He is the only interloper capable of disrupting her equilibrium through unwanted advances. To underscore her alienation, the heroine is made to turn away from society, toward nature. She is a solitary figure throughout a story entirely devoid of dialogue. Her co-workers and students at school are distant, even physically repulsive (123-24), and the strangers she sees passing on the street outside her home are likewise alien (127). Instead, her cat is her sole companion inside the brick and wood one-story house, which stands in juxtaposition to the 'reinforced concrete' city outside her window (122). Thus, this story underlines not only the suffering of soldiers' relatives, but also the backdrop of silence which characterized the Afghan War for Soviet citizens.

Ermakov's most recently published short story 'Kolokol'nya' ('Kolokol'nya') employs a first-person narrator and uses recollected episodes from Afghanistan, as in 'Simply Autumn'.[12] The story opens with the unnamed narrator's description of duty in Afghanistan, but the hero also dreams of the village of Kolokol'nya where he lived with his wife and an older couple before being drafted. He visits the village in the narrative present, but only in his imagination, or as a disembodied spirit, since the old

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[12]Oleg Ermakov, 'Kolokol'nya', Literaturnaya gazeta 29 August 1990: 6. This short story is printed entirely on one page, so references here are omitted.

man whom he addresses neither sees nor hears him. The narrator describes nostalgic or gently humourous memories connected with the farmhouse: harvests in the fields, reading religious texts in his garret, coaxing his wife into the garden to make love. Additionally, the narrator describes his son's birth and Orthodox baptism, in which the father also takes part at the old man's insistence. Although the conclusion of the story is ambiguous, the hero seems to describe his own death in Afghanistan by juxtaposing the sudden explosion of his universe -- perhaps a direct hit by a mortar shell on his vehicle -- with the death of a tortoise whose shell was maliciously shattered the previous day. Unexpectedly the narrator finds himself again in his village, where he now becomes visible to the old man. He has returned in spirit, as foreshadowed in the third paragraph of the story:

> [We soldiers] had a mute fear of eternity. We thought: if we could only for a moment return to our villages and cities, then let it be -- let us be sent to eternity afterward, if that's inevitable. But everyone departed directly from here, from these steppes, mountains, and deserts; they departed in torn shirts, blackened and bare.

Instead, this soldier's wish to return home once more has been granted, perhaps due to the intercession of the church. The last sentence describes how, as the narrator falls to his knees, the old man hastens to the church and rings the tower bell.

Ermakov juxtaposes the winter barracks routine in Afghanistan with the winter domestic chores of Kolokol'nya in order to contrast the values of these mutually opposed worlds. He describes with understated irony the dehumanizing routine of a soldier in Afghanistan: 'eat, sleep, march, fall ill with hepatitis and typhoid, clean gun barrels, obey officers and feed the lice.' The skills he learns include smoking narcotics, and maintaining a sense of calm while looking into the eyes of a doomed prisoner of war. This life is compared implicitly to the Russian farmstead, which evokes the pre-revolutionary self-sustaining household of Bunin's 'Antonov Apples' rather than a modern Soviet collective farm. Here the narrator harvests crops, conserves fruits and vegetables, and studies. The presence of women contributes to an image of fertility and civility. Even the physical environments are indirectly contrasted, with the maple trees of Kolokol'nya clearly more desirable than the rainy steppe of

Afghanistan. In this story, rural Russia is presented as paradise, a sanctuary from the alien landscape of tents and deserts in Afghanistan.

In contrasting these two worlds, Ermakov presents two different perceptions of time. For the narrator as soldier, the standard unit of time is a single day which counts down at a torturously slow pace ('There was the first day, and the second ...'). Furthermore, time travels in a straight line toward a single negative goal: escape from Afghanistan. For the narrator as village inhabitant, however, the perspective is seasonal ('And the first winter ... and the second winter ...'). Time is now cyclical, where the positive goal of harvest is repeated every year. The preparation for winter in Kolokol'nya unfolds according to nature's timetable and is recounted in rich domestic detail; this cycle is disrupted in Afghanistan, where 'soldiers learned not to guess or plan for the future.' With this story, Ermakov presents the war as a source of unmediated evil, separating the Russian from home and church.

In the third work under discussion, 'Pir na beregu fioletovoi reki' ('A Feast on the Bank of the Violet River'), Ermakov again contrasts duty in Afghanistan with life in the Soviet Union.[13] Even though all the characters survive, however, the conclusion is less sanguine than that of 'Kolokol'nya', because the main characters ultimately are made to feel foreign in their native land. Five soldiers retained beyond the normal two-year tour of duty are finally given orders to return home from Afghanistan. At the customs inspection at Kandahar, an imperious KGB officer threatens to send the group of friends back into combat because of the recalcitrance of Ninidze, who refuses to give up five pairs of sunglasses he has purchased as gifts. During the ensuing argument, the officer threatens to confiscate Ninidze's prized radio, so the glasses are forfeited without a fight. Later that night, Ninidze sneaks out of his tent and drops the radio into a latrine pit in order to avoid jeopardizing the group's homeward journey at the next inspection point, in Kabul. The group reaches Tashkent without further incident, but they are prevented from reaching home because there are no train tickets available for

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[13]Oleg Ermakov, 'Pir na fioletovoi reki', Znamya 10 (1989): 110-22.

the journey. Instead, they arrange an impromptu outdoor supper in a public garden next to a river illuminated only by the violet rays of the street lamps. During the 'feast', a series of revelations occur to members of the group as the loss of the radio, which Ninidze ascribes to theft, comes to light. Ninidze suddenly realizes that Reutov, a shy and unassuming fellow, probably knows about his lie yet has told no one. Shingarev and Spivakov nearly come to blows over the morality of smuggling souvenirs of war across the Soviet border: Shingarev implies that the radio was deservedly lost, while Spivakov defends the right to keep personal items earned in combat. In the final conversation before sleep, Shingarev recalls the circumstances under which the group first arrived in Afghanistan, and how they managed to keep the puny Reutov in their unit by urging him to display his singing and accordion-playing skills to their new company commander. At the story's conclusion, the five stranded friends are asleep on the ground the next morning under a light drizzle as solemn peace reigns over the public garden.

Ermakov presents the theme of this story, which is the disappointment of homecoming, as a sequence of barriers encountered by soldiers returning from Afghanistan. The narrative is divided into ten sections with alternating obstacles and advances, a structure which imparts a 'start/stop' rhythm to the narrative.[14] Thus, the three-month extension of service is followed by a frantic night of paperwork to complete the soldiers' orders (110); the departure of the soldiers is further retarded by the inability of the helicopters to land (111). The troops are held back from travelling to Kandahar because of failure to sweep the road for land-mines (111); once in Kandahar

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[14]There is not an exact one-to-one correspondence, however, between sections and narrative obstacles or advances. Rather, the sections seemingly alternate to emphasize either a lyric or dramatic purpose. For example, section one concludes with a change in location, emphasizing the lyric evocation of the Afghanistan camp. Section two covers a temporal event, the first inspection, for dramatic purposes as prologue to Ninidze's disposal of his radio; section three covers the storm for lyric interlude; section four details Ninidze's secret disposal as dramatic peripeteia; section five returns to a lyrical mode, conveying the mood of frustration with delay. Sections six, seven and eight continue in this vein to portray, in turn, heady expectation of departure, initial elation after arrival in Tashkent, and final disappointment over the failure to board a train. They are each set pieces which paint the emotional chain of events associated with homecoming. Section nine returns to dramatic impulse in a Chekhovian manner as the denouement occurs with a series of revelations; and the epilogue of section ten concludes the story with a lyrical depiction of the group sleeping in the morning rain.

they are almost permanently detained when the KGB inspector threatens to send all five soldiers back to their combat unit (113). At the airfield, the soldiers just miss the last passenger aircraft taking off ('Ter-rific, let's get a suntan', they cynically observe) (114). Unexpectedly, a cargo aeroplane is put at their disposal, but departure is again delayed until the soldiers agree to unload supplies (115). Once they are in Tashkent, their progress is halted because there are no commercial airline or train tickets available for the coming week (116), nor is there a train conductor amenable to bribery (117). This final obstacle leaves the protagonists stranded, sleeping in the rain (122). Ermakov opens his paragraphs with and repeats phrases such as 'All night' (110), or 'A half hour passed', 'Yet another half-hour passed' (114) to slow the passage of time into one extended delay. Ermakov seemingly chooses to conclude the story without depicting the final leg of the journey in order to reinforce the theme of unrealized expectations.

Additionally, the speed of the narrative decreases throughout the story.[15] A brief general prologue of two sentences covers the three-month delay of demobilization; the rest of the first section covers two additional days; while the longest section of the story is the ninth, devoting three pages to the single evening of the feast in Tashkent. Furthermore, Ermakov's descriptions of various towns and their inhabitants contribute to this narrative deceleration. Initially, the Afghan landscape is composed of immobile objects seen from a moving platform, thus imparting motion to the observer (111), whereas later descriptions of Tashkent are composed of moving objects seen from a stationary position (116). A closer look reveals that the initial view of the outside world is from a lorry, the second view is on foot but at a run during the storm (113), the third view (Tashkent) is while the soldiers are walking (116), and the fourth is provided as the men are immobilized by alcohol (118, 122). In the same way as the

[15] I use the term 'speed' of the narrative, (the relative amount of text devoted to a given time span) as defined by Gérard Genette in Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980) as cited in Booth 440.

feast grinds to a halt, the depiction of the surrounding environment contributes to the deceleration of the soldiers' progress.

The disillusionment of homecoming is depicted not only through the frustrated efforts in attaining goals, but also in the schizophrenic quality of the soldiers' lives, as if two worlds -- one of soldiers, one of civilians -- is on a collision course. Because of the three-month extension of duty, during which they continue to fight and die, the soldiers feel themselves to be living 'someone else's life' (110). Ermakov further underscores this disorienting experience with the contrasting sensations they feel during their last night in camp. One sentence includes both 'the scent of wormwood spread from the desert' and 'the stench of chlorine from the boxcar-like latrines'. It seems that since the date of scheduled demobilization, madness has become the norm: 'This was a normal night, but to those who smoked on the headquarters porch in anticipation of their turn to leave, the night seemed crazy' (110). Another layer of imagery is provided in the author's observation that 'from time to time soldiers from the regimental guard detail chased away sleep with short bursts of tracer rounds' (110). American troops in Vietnam labelled similar episodes 'mad minutes', an interesting coincidence with Ermakov's use of the word sumasshedshei in the identical context.[16] The firing, both for the Soviets and the Americans, would seem to serve a purpose beyond keeping the guards awake: it would punctuate the normally unbroken serenity of sentry duty with an artificial reminder of their grim purpose. Ermakov describes the guards firing their weapons as 'razgonyali son', which could be interpreted two ways: the sentries are chasing away not only sleep, but also the unaffordably indulgent dream of a peaceful, normal life. This phenomenon would underscore the uncanny division between two worlds that Ermakov evokes, one pacific, the other bellicose.

Subsequent encounters between the soldiers and the military authorities further develop the contrast between two opposing worlds, transferred now to the realm of

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[16] I heard this account of American soldiers firing tracer rounds into the surrounding countryside from a Vietnam veteran who had been stationed at a small outpost. At odd times, a perimeter guard would begin to fire into the jungle for no apparent reason, after which the other sentries would quickly join in, and then as abruptly cease.

satire. The commander, leaning on a cane, purposefully projects the image of a combat-hardened leader who has sustained a war wound; the troops are unaware that the colonel actually strained a tendon while jumping from an armoured transport (110). The customs inspection under the supervision of a tyrannical KGB junior officer is a farcical scene of misdirected suspicion (111-13). Ninidze is falsely accused of smuggling foreign goods and forfeits the sunglasses he bought as gifts, after which he throws away his radio to avoid a possible further humiliation at the next inspection, a fear which proves unfounded. Also ironically, Reutov, the one person in the group who does not smoke anasha, is accused of being an addict. These images contribute a darkly comic tint to the atmosphere of unreality during the interval between the soldiers' last combat patrol and their final departure for home.

Ermakov contrasts these different worlds through the juxtaposition of mundane events taking place during the day with critical junctures occurring at night. The word 'night' is repeated four times in the opening paragraph, creating a backdrop which brackets the general prologue. This creates the impression that the previous three months have also been spent in a sunless world. That is, since the time they have come to expect their orders home, the soldiers have found themselves in a new reality. Furthermore, the actual departure orders are written during the night (110); the peripeteia of the story occurs at night, when Ninidze creeps out of the tent to dispose of his radio (114); and the homecoming celebration feast of section nine, containing a series of revelations comprising the denouement, also takes place at night. In sections four and nine the reader is made well aware of the darkness: the first two paragraphs of section four begin 'The samoom [sand storm] died down late that night' (113) and 'In the deep of night' (114), while paragraphs one and three of section nine begin with identical sentences, 'It was late at night' (118, 119) for added emphasis.

In contrast, Ermakov represents the former reality of the soldiers' lives in Afghanistan in terms of daytime events; during the day, no revelations or narrative junctures occur. For example, daytime inspections have no practical result: the officials discover nothing illegal -- in fact, as Ermakov takes pains to point out, there is

nothing illegal to discover -- and are in turn inefficient, arbitrary, amateurish, and mistaken.[17] While nocturnal delays are fraught with life-or-death implications, waiting during the day -- for the commanding colonel to dismiss his troops, or for a cargo plane at the flightline -- is merely an empty exercise in frustration without the potential to make a radical alteration in anyone's life. Events in daylight are outcomes of previous events; they continue the action, or provide lyrical backdrops, rather than opening new avenues of narrative potential. A comparison of the first and last sections of the story encapsulates this dichotomy. The story opens at night, but with all the soldiers awake, and aware of an impending change; the tale concludes in the morning, with all five friends asleep like a helpless litter of puppies, and progress halted.

The violet glow of the street lamps which illuminates objects only at night reveals other facets of this new world. The glow reflects from every angle during the nocturnal feast: 'Along the opposite bank stretched the dilapidated walls of squat brick buildings, and over their roofs hung street lamps, casting a violet sheen over the black roofs, onto the river and the soldiers' (118); 'the violet river stood between the banks' (118); 'the river was silent, violet and motionless' (119). The colour suggests that the ex-soldiers now inhabit a twilight world without benefit of the stark contrasts in values and action which they knew in Afghanistan. Here there is no declared war, outright bribes and violence no longer are effective means to control one's destiny, and the goal is never quite attained.

The symbolic use of the violet light also highlights the importance of Reutov, a shy and rather puny figure. In a brief aside toward the story's conclusion, the reader learns how Reutov was awarded a place with his friends in an elite reconnaissance unit only by singing a Cossack 'chastushka' to the officer in charge of choosing new

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[17]In one sense, the inspection is useful as a re-socialization process through which the soldier is re-initiated into a society where frustration with bureaucracy is the norm. From this point onward, natural impulses such as gift-giving are repressed at every turn. At the story's end, Ninidze curses every authority from the KGB lieutenant to army headquarters for 'not guaranteeing a normal return home' (119).

arrivals.[18] Ermakov stresses the way the violet light from the street lamps illuminates Reutov's face at several critical junctures: when Ninidze realizes that his secret is known to Reutov ('he saw a narrow face, illuminated in violet') (119), and when Reutov's presence is made known to the drunken Romanov ('Reutov's narrow violet-coloured face was covered with wrinkles' (121). In some ways Reutov represents a Christ figure among his disciples, as Ermakov couches elements of his story, and elements of Reutov's characterization, in religious imagery. During the feast, clearly an evocation of the Last Supper, red wine is drunk; the talk turns to pronouncements on matters of fate, although in simple terms ('Easy come, easy go') (120); a dispute arises amongst the friends, with accusations of guilt ('So you think you're perfect?') (121); and betrayal is intimated with a toast offered by the inebriated Romanov: 'May our arms and legs, but never our friends, let us down' (122). Romanov says that someone is missing, and Reutov replies from the shadows: 'Here I am ... Have no doubt' (121). Indeed, Reutov's face evokes the haunted and piercing eyes of Christ as portrayed in Byzantine iconography: 'a narrow face, illuminated in violet: black wrinkles, a long bony nose, fine black lips, and black points for eyes' (119).

Ermakov again draws on Biblical imagery to paint the desert whirlwind in apocalyptic terms: 'it seemed somehow supernatural and final, like the voice of the seventh trumpet' (113). The reference obviously intensifies the threat of physical destruction as found in Revelations 11. 19 where lightning and thunder, earthquake and hail are associated with the Seventh Angel blowing his trumpet. The allusion also presents an intriguing contrast between the delays suffered by the soldiers, and the illusory promise of instant, if destructive, resolution to their journey at the symbolic as well as the physical level. In Revelation 10. 5-6, the Seventh Angel swears 'that there shall be delay no longer'. Thus Ermakov appropriately uses the word 'final' to

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[18]Reutov, who also plays the accordion, sings the chastushka (according to the Oxford Russian-English Dictionary, 2nd ed., 'a two-lined or four-lined rhymed poem or ditty on some topical or humorous theme') at his friend's request to 'do something 'Rostov-on-Don-like' ('sdelai chto-nibud' rostovsko-donskoe') in order to impress the company commander (121). Carey Schofield notes, 'soldiers who sing or play instruments well are welcome additions to any unit.' See Carey Schofield, Inside the Soviet Army (London: Headline Publishing, 1991) 79.

characterize the storm, in contrast both to the interminable delays experienced by the soldiers to that point, as well as to future disruptions to their schedule, and possibly to the rest of their lives.

To portray the new and frustrating world in which the soldiers now find themselves, Ermakov satirizes the bureaucracy. The officious KGB lieutenant ('from the Special Department') who conducts customs inspections, possesses a severe and formal personality. He is fond of sentences such as 'I am not joking in the least' (112) and 'It's always something serious' (113).[19] Furthermore, the author states that the KGB operative is the only officer in the entire company to address soldiers with the formal vy, thus representing formalism, an oft-mentioned evil in the Soviet army (111).[20] The train conductor, another authority figure, possesses a similar brusqueness. His conversation consists for the most part of monosyllabic grunts and foul words: 'Well.'/'What?'/'No.'/ 'Shitheads!' No appeal to his sympathies as a former soldier will suffice. Romanov even begs: 'Can you (ty) possibly reply to me as a human being?' (117)

Despite the group's camaraderie, the story remains gloomy; indeed, certain communal aspects of male society are employed to reinforce this sombre mood. One section, which consists of a paean to the female sex (116), only highlights the veterans' disappointment at the end of the story. In this section, Ermakov calls Tashkent 'the city of women' and conveys the returning soldier's appreciation of their presence through

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[19]The 'Special Department' is the KGB counter-intelligence organization. 'Whereas the political workers (zampolity) are unquestionably soldiers and an integral part of the army, the Osobists, equally unquestionably, are not. The Ministry of Defense army generally expresses respect for the KGB's border guards and its other armed units. But the Osobists, with their somewhat broad interpretation of counter-intelligence, are another matter. However necessary their function might be, there is clearly no love lost between them and the commanders. The army's nickname for these people, molchi-molchi (roughly, 'keep your mouth shut'), says it all.' Schofield 36-37.

[20]Ermakov generally employs informal address by officers towards their men to signify personal, patriarchal relationships, and this in turn reflects a demand by the ranks for an asymmetrical relationship in order to affirm patronage. When formality is introduced, the promise of protection is implicitly threatened. 'One of the first acts of the Provisional Government in 1917 was to force all commissioned officers to use vy to privates; but the Red Army reintroduced ty, eventually extending it to all subordinates.' Paul Friedrich, 'Structural Implications of Russian Pronominal Usage', Sociolinguistics, Series Maior 20, gen. ed. William Bright (The Hague: Mouton, 1966) 235. Ermakov also employs exceptions ('pronominal switching', Friedrich 239) to this rule; note the haughty general's use of ty as a means of humiliation when speaking to the subordinate colonel in 'Znak zverya' (55).

lists of attributes which juxtapose the apparent attributes of the women with those of the city. A general descriptive introduction in sets of three attributes is given to the city ('noisy, vast, tall'), the populace ('full, forthright, happy'), and finally women ('This was a city of women's eyes, hair, and lips'). The city and its female inhabitants are then interrelated with six locations where women could be seen ('in shop windows, on buses, cars, in house windows, doorways, market stalls'). This is followed by an outpouring of twelve adjectives describing the women themselves ('young, mature, old, adolescent, curvaceous, ugly, narrow-hipped, Rubenesque, almond-eyed, round-eyed, dark-haired, red-haired') before concluding with four final attributes ('women with birthmarks on their cheeks, with bare shoulders, in skirts and in transparent skirts'). This rhythmic celebration conveys the sensual delight for the returning soldier in seeing women again, especially those of one's own nationality -- familiar to any man re-entering society following prolonged isolation.[21] Just as important, it also serves as counterpoint to the loneliness of the young men during their pitiable feast, where no women are present.

In this treatment of the soldiers' homecoming, Ermakov seems to have used the same framework as in 'Safe Return'. Many of the details of 'Safe Return' are found in 'Feast': the delayed arrival of helicopters to take the men home; the fifteen-kilometre stretch of road over which the trucks travel on the initial leg of their journey; the description of the geographic and human landscapes bordering the roads; the similar format of respective descriptions of Tashkent and Kabul at sunset; the problem of lice at the transfer station; protagonists praying for a jet aeroplane to take them home on schedule ('[Ninidze] asked his Starik to make it possible for them to fly away in the morning; then he went to sleep' ('Violet River', 114); 'In a dream [Orshev] thought: let there be good weather and a jet' ('Safe Return', 164)); the necessity of unloading the

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[21]Noted also by Tolstoy, for example, in 'Khadzhi-Murat', Kavkazskie rasskazy i povesti (Moscow: Sovetskaya Rossiya, 1983) 283.

transport aircraft; the suffocating heat experienced by the soldiers once on board.[22] There are contrasts, however, which may show that Ermakov reworked certain autobiographical events to change the focus from an individual character in 'Safe Return' to the communal aspect of soldiering in 'Feast'. For example, in 'Safe Return' Orshev is 'sick and tired of army talk' about women and food, and silence is a major motif in underscoring the veteran's isolation. Conversely, in 'Feast', where dialogue comprises more than half the text, the soldiers derive much pleasure in discussing the prostitutes in Tashkent versus the girls of Tokmak, and debating the merits of port wine versus vodka (115, 118). On board the plane, Orshev in 'Safe Return' decides not to ask a fellow passsenger if he may peer over his shoulder one last time at Kabul, while in 'Feast' an artilleryman does just that, approaching Reutov and demanding his window seat from him (116).[23] And where in 'Safe Return' the group of friends is dispersed before the story opens, they remain together in 'Feast'. Although 'Feast' is Ermakov's only example of a 'platoon' story, his theme remains as pessimistic as in his studies of individual protagonists. He uses this story to underscore the isolation of Afghan veterans in Soviet society, and their impending mutual dependence in peacetime, mirroring their dependence on one another in combat.

'Zheltaya gora' ('Yellow mountain'), the last work to be discussed in this chapter, is in many ways Ermakov's most ambitious short story.[24] The author again describes the combat in Afghanistan as a recollection placed in the context of a soldier's return. Moreover, the story combines diverse stylistic elements, including psychological realism, broad political satire, stories within stories, and dreams within dreams. 'Yellow Mountain' includes many features which are incorporated into Ermakov's subsequent novel 'The Sign of the Beast', discussed in the next chapter.

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[22]Less easily proved are other hypothetical similarities. In both stories, for example, important thematic information is conveyed during a meal by a river: the lorry driver's attitude to freedom in 'Blagopoluchnoe vozvrashchenie', Ninidze's realization of Reutov's secret knowledge in 'Pir'.
[23]While it is possible to imagine the introspective Orshev playfully intruding into another story in the guise of a dull-witted artilleryman, or a series of stories depicting various possible narrative permutations as each character is in turn left behind, the texts do not support such a reading.
[24]Oleg Ermakov, 'Zheltaya gora'.

Fedya Pryadil'nikov, a disabled Afghan war veteran, lives in his one-room flat and works as a journalist on the staff of a youth newspaper in an unnamed city. Neither his spartan existence -- on coffee, cigarettes and rock music -- nor his job of writing propaganda for the newspaper, afford him much satisfaction. Fedya's one attempt at writing the truth -- his recently submitted memoir about service in Afghanistan -- is rejected for publication because the manuscript contains a satirical indictment of military leadership and of army life in general. The effort earns him only a rebuke from Zavsepech, the party functionary and publishing chief, and gentler admonishments from his co-workers. In the story's final section, haunting memories surface in the hero's consciousness while he is drinking alone that night. He recollects the death of his best friend in Afghanistan, a man with whom he shared a love of poetry. The memory of this man's death is intertwined with the recollection of some cranes which were massacred by members of Pryadil'nikov's unit -- a slaughter in which Pryadel'nikov took part. Awakening the next morning, Pryaldil'nikov recalls from childhood the day he ran away and sought refuge from the imposed discipline of parents and teachers near a vaguely recalled yellow mountain. Determined to find this mountain again, he embarks on a journey into the countryside, and on the following morning reaches his destination.

The primary theme in this story is the conflict between the rebellious Afghan veteran and the repressive Soviet political hierarchy. Fedya wears blue jeans to work, a style of dress associated with the capitalist West in the minds of the Soviet establishment: 'The [older] man looked disapprovingly at the faded jeans of the journalist; he probably was sorry that only women were forbidden to enter here in capitalist trousers' (105). Pryadil'nikov's limp from a war wound (104) also elicits suspicious responses from the older generation of hardline communists; Zavsepech feels that even debilitated veterans must earn their flats and automobiles by demonstrating professional dedication and political maturity (112). True, the two thugs outside the vodka shop initially defer to Fedya because of his limp, but only because they do not wish to take advantage of an unequal opponent. In the eyes of the general

public whose attention had been so little occupied with the conflict, a young man's disabilities normally were not associated with war. Fedya's indignation at official censorship, and the resultant public ignorance of the war with its consequent condescension toward its veterans, add fuel to his rash decision to risk his life in a fist fight (114-15).

Fedya's spiritual characteristics mark him -- and by extension every Afghan veteran -- as an alienated outsider. Fedya is obsessed with the past, as if his very being has been captured by the Afghan experience. This is most apparent in his preoccupation with dreams, as if his life is now over, and the only task remaining is one of divining its meaning. Pryadil'nikov's bewitched condition is also reflected in his car's nickname bronevik (104), diminuitive for bronya, a slang term for an armoured personnel vehicle.[25] Moreover, Ermakov notes that the car is 'sand-coloured', while the 'stone labyrinths' of the city seem to conjure up visions of rocky cliffs surrounding a narrow mountain pass in Afghanistan (104). The images are ironic, however, since the diminutive car must usher its owner past the distinctly unheroic 'bus-stops, crowds, stores and restaurants' of a typical Soviet city.

The hero's spiritual sickness is made manifest in fears of displacement in society. Pryadil'nikov associates this displacement with the reversal of sexual roles in which his own identity has been subverted. This role reversal is portrayed in suggestive images where, for example, the men shake each others' 'soft white hands' (104), while the women wear 'severe suits' in imitation of the 'Iron Lady', Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (105). Ermakov's insight reveals a veteran's anxiety caused by leaving an all-male environment and re-entering a society where females seem to have much more power. But this threatening perception does not correspond with reality; Fedya's antagonistic vision of women is confined to the strangers in the lobby and the elevator, whereas the actual women with whom he works are sympathetic. Liza, his supervisor, is presented as a mother figure, and Marina, his co-

[25]Alexander Alexiev, Inside the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, R-3627-A (Santa Monica: RAND, 1988) xiii. Bronya, literally 'armour', was used to designate the BTR.

worker, is a heartbroken youngster infatuated with the protagonist. Ermakov thus shows Fedya's perception of role reversal solely as symptomatic of the hero's anxiety about his own loss of identity.

Yet another constellation of spiritual associations links the Afghan veteran to the underworld. Despite his promise to Liza, Fedya drives to a vodka store and nearly gets involved in a knife fight with several men whom Liza characterizes as ex-convicts (115). Fedya's subsequent proposition to his boss contains intimations of alcohol abuse, adultery, deception, violence, and prison in a single passage. Ermakov presents a character walking an increasingly thin line between accepted society and the yawning gulf of the underworld. Fedya may be seen as heir to Valery Shukshin's character Egor Prokudin in 'Snowball Berry Red', with the Afghan veteran assuming the role of the weak-willed but well-intentioned man who is victimized by his past.

These images of rebellion are buttressed by equally vivid portrayals of a character suspended between two worlds. Fedya is clearly anti-establishment, but at the same time condemns in conservative tones the anarchic youths who fall back on escapism in the lyrics of rock songs (104). Likewise, he alternately ignores or is rejected by his co-workers. He argues with Zavsepech and spurns Marina; conversely, a correspondent rejects his invitation to go for a drink (113-14), and Liza deflects his advances. Equally revealing, he is not yet sure how to treat the militiamen in the lobby of the building where he works. 'He walked past the militiamen, looking askance. He had not yet learned how to nod to them in a condescending manner, and as for a fraternal nod -- he just couldn't.' Even the physical environment serves to bifurcate Pryadil'nikov's world into camps between which the hero is unwillingly caught. Ermakov explains that the newspaper building is divided into two wings -- one for the Party and one for Youth. The militiamen have two separate phones, one black and one white. Even the rock singer croons, 'It's very simple if you come with us, where black is black and white is white' (104). Through these details Ermakov constructs a vision of paired, contrasting worlds. His protagonist refuses to pledge allegiance to one, and no longer feels comfortable in the other. While a psychological state of uneasy

suspension between youthful idealism and adult responsibilities could apply to anyone in their twenties, Ermakov applies this condition to the Afghan veteran returning home.

To add resonance to Pryadil'nikov's rebellious struggle against personal and societal demons, Ermakov again uses the poet Sergei Esenin as a model for his hero's actions. Egor Petrovich nicknames Fedya after Esenin's famous blue eyes (sinie bryzgi), and asks him why he always looks for trouble (113). Just as Esenin married the older Isadora Duncan, Pryadil'nikov is attracted to the older Liza. Fedya's love affair with nature while living in the city, along with the deleterious effects of alcohol and urban pressures on the hero's personality, also have parallels in Esenin's life.[26] These details reinforce the image of semi-adolescent sensibilities searching for direction. Indeed, the story could be interpreted on one level as a passage from insecurity to maturity, from passive acquiescence to active (although not always successful) intervention in events which shape the protagonist's life. At first, for example, Fedya speaks out at Komsomol meetings only as a joke, but remains silent during the politically charged briefing described in his memoir. He even calls himself a coward for his willingness to obey Major Akimov (109). In contrast, he ignores Zavsepech's order to summon his supervisor during their argument in the editorial office. This is such a reckless move that Marina tells him in amazement, 'You've lost your mind', with which he agrees (112). The story documents Fedya's quest, like that of Esenin, for his own identity.

Ermakov portrays society's power brokers with imagery traditionally reserved for western imperialists. The circular figures and faces of overfed capitalists wearing ovoid top hats, and who are vulnerable to the sharp cutting edges of the heroic Bolshevik physiognomy, are familiar images from early revolutionary posters. But after the Afghan War, these markers are associated with corrupt Soviet bureaucrats, as expressed in the lyrics of the rock song that Pryadil'nikov overhears. 'The uncles in top hats suddenly will begin to swear, call each other goats, and send you a draft

[26]Gordon McVay, Esenin (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976) 43, 140, 175-77, 197.

notice' (104). Such terms as 'duty', 'carnage', and 'draft notices' refer to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. In keeping with this imagery, the reader is told that the reprehensible Zavsepech has a 'round face' (104), and that his glasses reflect light, suggesting two opaque circles (111). Pryadil'nikov's military overlords in Afghanistan are drawn with circular bald patches, glowing foreheads and plump white cheeks (110). Thus the traditional round figures of the imperialists from revolutionary times now find their modern counterparts in the Soviet Communist Party, both civilian and military.[27]

The Party apparatchiki are also marked through their corrupt use of language. Zavsepech's impromptu propaganda speech for Army and Navy Day is notable for omissions when he stammers: 'Our nation has long lived under a peaceful heaven, while to you and your generation has fallen the task of wa--wa--that is, circumstances have turned out, such that for you...' ('...a tebe, tvoim sverstnikam vypala...e-e... vypalo...vypala... to est' obstoyatel'stva tak slozhilis', chto vam...') (105). His hesitations seem to reveal his quandary about how to avoid direct use of the word 'war'. The speech becomes ever more abstract: the phrase 'you accepted direct, so to speak, participation...' is substituted for 'you fought'. In an amusing finale mediated through Pryadil'nikov's venomous memory, Zavsepech's sentence structure breaks down completely into irrelevant slogans:

> Spain, heroes of the revolution, southern borders, the Americans are not relaxing ... but you didn't let those hawks peck the young revolution to death, terror, bandits, intrigues, valour, honour, Russian might, sunny skies -- yes! yes! yes! -- nuclear war -- no! no! no! (105)

Ermakov's bureaucratic targets also include the local office of Glavlit, the Soviet censorship agency which was until recently the most powerful organ for repression in the press. Pryadil'nikov recalls that the office censor once halted

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[27]Interestingly, Ermakov also could be comparing Pryadil'nikov's vision of contemporary Communist society to the corrupt nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle aristocratic elite. The rock song lyrics (104) contain the line '...and we will look at the sun', recalling the Symbolist credo, and Pryadil'nikov later remembers how his friend recited the poetry of Bunin and Blok (116). Perhaps Prydil'nikov is drawn to the Symbolists because he fears, just as was imagined a century ago, the approach of apocalypse for a world suddenly (especially to an Afghan veteran) out of joint.

publication of a column which printed in the same laudatory line the names of both Bulgakov and a contemporary author, the implication being that such an insult to the latter would not be tolerated. Egor Petrovich, the sympathetic editor, disagrees with this judgement: 'The editor replied that he, and the collective, and the editorial board, and the author of the article and all progressive peoples of the planet didn't see any nonsense in it' (105). This triggers a savage counter-attack by the censor, couched in ossified terms similar to Zavsepech's speech, such as 'worldwide values of socialist realism'. As if to emphasize the frustrating nature of censorship, Ermakov never names these functionaries. Instead, he describes the door to their office, and uses impersonal references: for example, 'They called the editor and told him...' (105). In this way Ermakov decries the loss to creative art caused by this class of anonymous bureaucrats.

The final institution to come under attack is the army. An excerpt from Pryadil'nikov's war memoirs forms the short story 'Army Oratory' which has been rejected by his editor. The first section of this story describes the interruption of a small birthday celebration at a camp perimeter checkpoint in Afghanistan. The company commander, Major Akimov, arrives unannounced to check for the use of illegal drugs, puts a stop to the celebration, and threatens the soldiers with harsh discipline for their putative lack of vigilance. He employs abusive language, physical violence (he sweeps the modest meal from the table, and the lieutenant pursues the birthday celebrant as he tries to run away), and threats of physical confinement to the glasshouse (when the sergeant balks at the command to clean up the mess while on guard duty).[28] The last vestiges of a normal social life are thus ridiculed and destroyed by the man who embodies military values.

Pryadil'nikov's 'oratory' later widens its attack to include, by implication, the Party. In response to a soldier's absence without leave because of harassment, Major

[28]These latter two events -- clearing the table and pursuing the terrified soldier -- seem to be incorporated into the initial dream sequence in 'Safe Return'.

Akimov delivers an agitprop speech which is identical in form to Zavsepech's impassioned outburst.

He said: a peaceloving foreign policy, but when a neighbour suffers, and so we're here, tense times, imperialistic adventures, an undeclared war, losses, hardships, glorious Armed Forces, born in fire, tradition, a high fighting spirit, patriotism, heroes of military and political preparation, dozens of successful operations, the Red Guard cavalry, dozens of medals, three Heroes of the Soviet Union... (110)

Because Akimov rails against such 'vestiges of the past' as bribery, drunkenness, and hooliganism, it is obvious that these examples of deviant social behaviour are threatening to become the norm. The entire speech parodies the composite Party political speech, and thus comprises a caustic attack on the basic institutions of Soviet society. In view of this broadside directed at the army brass, the political officers, and by extension the Party and Komsomol, it is no wonder that Pryadil'nikov's memoirs are rejected by the editor.

Indeed, that Znamya published 'Yellow Mountain' at all indicates the extent to which they believed that the contemporary Soviet leadership was committed to glasnost. To an extent greater than in any of his other stories, Ermakov uses satire to lash out at a society which is hostile to the Afghan war veteran. When encouraged to portray the war's beneficial facets, Pryadil'nikov sarcastically replies that the benefits of service included free cigarettes and lax standards about shaving during combat operations (107). To lampoon Party management, Fedya imagines "Twenty Years Without a Harvest Collective Farm" as an appropriate name for any agricultural enterprise unlucky enough to have Zavsepech in charge (104). The Komsomol is sent up when Fedya reveals that he was directed to attend the army meeting because he was considered an activist, when in fact his usual questions were simply a tactic to entertain a sleepy audience (110). These and other examples provide an acid base for Ermakov's satire, constituting some of the strongest criticism of the Party and the military to be found in Afghan War literature. With this tale, Ermakov mounts a frontal attack on established bastions of power which, after seven decades, now found themselves subject to open indictment.

The story is not restricted to a sober depiction of social conflict, however; Fedya's inner turmoil plays an equal role. Ermakov's rebellious hero can achieve peace only by reconciling himself with his past, and this is accomplished through the recovery of his memories. Thus, to interpret the meaning of Ermakov's story at the personal level of the protagonist is to interpret the three sequences of recollections woven into the narrative.

The first series of recollections focuses on the cranes, and is divided into three parts. It begins with an evocation of paradise in the opening sentence, the description of the dreamy autumn morning: 'it was dry, warm, and yellow' (103). This image foreshadows the phrase 'it was quiet, warm' used in the first daydream about the flock of birds landing in an identical setting (107). Both memories evoke somnambulent images of early morning, soft bare mountains, and blissful stillness. The contrasting second part of the dream about the cranes, however, depicts the warrant officer as he opens fire on the birds with his automatic weapon (111). Pryadil'nikov remembers that this slaughter of innocent wildlife was his initiation to battle, since the two-day patrol had yet to encounter enemy forces. The concluding third part of the dream is left for that evening when Fedya becomes intoxicated (117). As he drinks, the first part of the dream is repeated, but as it continues, the reader learns that Fedya, in a surge of blood-lust, also fired into the flock. This is Fedya's loss of innocence, a crime which apparently affects him more deeply than any later actual combat, including the action in which he presumably is wounded.[29]

The second recollection concerns his friend's death, and is contained in a single episode. This reminiscence underscores the hero's isolation. The dead friend, who remains unnamed, was clearly an exceptional fellow: not every reconnaissance soldier

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[29]Compare this anguished modern image to similar incidents portrayed in the fiction of earlier eras. In Taras Bul'ba, Nikolai Gogol casually expressed the confident martial spirit of the Zaporozhan Cossacks by documenting their hunting exploits, including shooting flocks of birds. Nikolai Gogol, Taras Bul'ba (Kishinev: Literatura artistike, 1978) 41. In a more recent narrative instance which portrays the mindless violence of war, see Issac Babel's laconic story 'Moi pervyi gus" in which the protagonist crushes the head of a goose in order to silence its owner, and impress his comrades. See Isaak Babel, 'Odesskie rasskazy' i drugie proizvedeniya, comp. M. Vainshtein (N.p.: Institut Rossiiskogo Evreistva, 1988) 228-31.

writes verses, much less recites those of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Verlaine. Fedya must now compare in retrospect the insipid propaganda he is producing for the newspaper with the poetry his friend found it so painful to write. This dream portrays the symbolic death of Fedya's own creative efforts, made manifest when his memoirs are consigned to the 'desk drawer' (107).

The third memory is about Yellow Mountain, and provides resolution to Fedya's guilt and isolation. The child's long-forgotten escape from home to the mountain along with a pet rabbit which his father had threatened to destroy if Fedya's school marks did not improve, finally returns to the adult's memory (117). The final section combines reality and dream when the mature Pryadil'nikov finds the yellow mountain of his youth (119). The sun rises as if over the Afghan desert, and the hero is visited by the black cranes once again, though they seem to be visitors from the past rather than actual birds. The story concludes:

> He came down from the mountain slowly. He smoothly descended the mountain. He quietly walked down. In front of him hopped a white hare. The birds saw them and became hushed. They did not fly away. The large black birds waited, turning their heads towards him. (119)

The appearance of the animals -- the rabbit and the birds -- signifies the path for which Fedya has been searching. The escape to nature in his youth, during which Fedya tried to save the rabbit's life and in so doing demonstrated his true spiritual values, redresses the crimes he has committed as a man under a warped system of lies and coercion. Now, the birds do not fly away, but instead look upon him as if in forgiveness. It suggests that the goal has been reached, and that this Yellow Mountain is an Eden for Pryadil'nikov's conscience. The hero now obeys an internal authority rather than one imposed from without.

Through a tunnel of dreams, then, the hero emerges into a natural world of harmony and light. This other universe, embodied by nature, is portrayed as superior to the one created by the petty scheming of human beings. While mediating the argument between Zavsepech and Fedya, the sympathetic Egor Petrovich amusingly daydreams aloud: 'A village. Fresh milk, fishing,' he muttered. 'Hunting for hares, a

little bathhouse, a garden, a herd of mad bulls -- paradise' (113). Indeed, Ermakov fills the final section of the story with a cornucopia of animal life, plants and trees: thrushes, jays, blackbirds, maple trees, red ferns, and mushrooms. Flora are anthropomorphized: the oak tree allows acorns to drop into the boy's waiting hands, and the guelder rose is addressed as 'auntie', a patroness protecting him from wolves and other terrors of the night. She also 'feeds' the boy with her berries, recalling the opening dream of the woman feeding berries to Pryadil'nikov (103). It is in unity with nature that the hero feels most comforted, both in childhood and as an adult (118). At the story's climax, the entire mountain comes alive with mice and birds rustling in the undergrowth, as if to welcome the hero back from a perilous journey in a dangerous foreign land.

Colours are important within Ermakov's system of imagery. As the title suggests, yellow signifies life, home, the centre of Fedya's universe. Whenever bright colours illuminate an object, brighter emotions do also. The colour yellow is mentioned in the first sentence of the story, linking that first dream to the final vision. During the initially unsuccessful search for the yellow mountain, the hero encounters grey fields, an empty sky, and houses in silhouette, drained of colour. Toward sunset, however, warm autumn colours of red and gold predominate in the oak and maple leaves, and the ferns. This duplicates his memories of the area as a boy, when the mountain glowed in shades of yellow. The final section is painted almost exclusively in yellows, from the hayrick in the field to the golden sunrise. Repeated references to yellow leaves form an ecstatic vision, until it becomes evident that Fedya has indeed found the place of refuge of his youth.[30]

One final note concerning Freudian imagery may be made. In 'Yellow Mountain', this element concerns Ermakov's depiction of a journey toward maturity. Fedya's initially infantile sexuality is expressed in his relationship with Liza, a mother

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[30]Ermakov's observations do not all fit a tidy colour scheme, of course. Contrasting images of silver and dreams of snow are presented as gentle nighttime contrast to the coming of day (118), while the green of the desert and of the armoured column, for example, or the green and blue streaks of marble in the mountain rocks, are probably provided simply for visual detail.

figure: he completes his article and is rewarded with a kiss, then begs her for money to buy milk and bread, which he spends on liquor after a childlike promise to the contrary. And during the recollection of the slaughter of the birds, which are identified with Liza, there is a sexual implication in Ermakov's description of Fedya's impulsive firing into the flock:

> ...one of the sentries took his weapon from his shoulder and, without aiming, fired off a short burst. The second and third sentries seized their rifles also and began to fire. And Pryadil'nikov took his automatic from his shoulder and fired off two long tracer bursts. First-second-third-fourth. First! Second! Third! Fourth! (117)

As in the opening dream of 'Safe Return', the image of the four sentries firing in turn merges intimations of gang rape with Oedipal desire to intensify the horror of the sin he has committed. Additionally, the minor character of Gostev, the staff cartoonist, constantly spouts unclever double-entendres and sexual innuendoes (111). His constant references to 'S. Freud', however, are a shabby cloak thrown over a prurient nature. He is a ridiculous figure, mirroring the initial immaturity of Pryadil'nikov, and the image of the protagonist's potential fate within a stifling bureaucracy.[31]

Ermakov employs stream of consciousness to convey the emotional journey upon which the central character is embarked. For example, the first dream sequence of the cranes' slaughter is expressed in one extended sentence (107). Another example is the hero's grief at farewell over the corpse of his friend in Afghanistan:

> It was hot, flies swarmed on the sheets; he stood in the sun amidst the scorched yard of the field hospital, under the tent the sheets showed white, the yard slowly began to describe a circle, smooth circles, in the centre the unmoving sheets reflected white, like shrouds, like stone, the yard spun, and around in circles whirled the yard, the medical tent and the marble latrines, with the stench of chlorine, and the sun was smeared with the glutinous brown mass, the stinking chlorine spread across the sky, swam over the earth, while the flies swarmed about the sheets, here and there, back and forth... (116)

This technique descends to the level of individual syllables and phonemes in order to convey the power of horrific demons in the hero's imagination: 'trr-ss-shhh...' (111),

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[31]Ermakov seems to lampoon a body of knowledge which he himself occasionally uses seriously in his own stories. It would be interesting to speculate as to whether the character of Gostev was originally intended as a false trail for the Soviet censors, textual 'evidence' supplied by Ermakov to prove that he was not really a proponent of Freudianism.

'liz-liz-liz' (116). Neologisms are employed to show a man on the verge of psychological breakdown, as the dream of the cranes acquires the force of a recurring hallucination: '...it was quiet, warm, white were the flowers, the flowers reflected white, whiteflowers, crane-woman...D-damn it!' (114) In this case, a crane-woman becomes for a moment a real creature as well as a symbol of guilt in the mind of the hero. The precision of his psychological realism is nicely conveyed in the line, 'Toward evening his head began to crackle from tobacco and military-patriotic phrases, like a furnace stuffed with fir-tree logs...' (113). Appropriately, when Pryadil'nikov returns to childhood memories, his writing reflects this regression with brief telegraphic sentences, at times restricted to basic noun-verb combinations.

> The acorns were falling. Evening was coming on. Between the trees flew fat thrushes and bright jays. In the grass the mushrooms grew plump. A lush yellow autumn. And completely peaceful. A rabbit nearby. The guelder rose tree, like a human figure. A large bush, a completely different figure. But still human. Come, feed yourself with berries, come here. (118)

The narrator's persona becomes childlike by animating the surrounding landscape, even hearing the comforting voice of the guelder rose tree. The consciousness of the child, filtered through the adult memory, transforms long sentences into a series of short simple phrases.

'Zheltaya gora' is in many ways Ermakov's most ambitious story, combining diverse stylistic elements from psychological realism to broad political satire, experimenting with stories within stories, and dreams within dreams. In order to present his theme of paradise lost and regained, Ermakov uses psychological realism to depict this painful journey of self-discovery. He also aims a satiric arrow at the society which sent the veteran to fight, and yet restricts his freedom to reveal the truth about the fighting. The author thus interweaves several sub-plots to present the protagonist's inner turmoil, and includes a bitter attack on social institutions to underscore the severity of his alienation.

The five stories treated in this chapter deal with the interaction of Soviet society and the returning veteran. Consistent with his negative portrayal of the war, Ermakov stresses the disillusionment of homecoming, and the pain suffered by relatives of soldiers killed in action. He chooses protagonists from the ranks of those who suffered -- the soldiers and their loved ones -- and places them in a literary, religious, and nationalist context. Redemption also comes through communion with nature. Those whom Ermakov blames for the war -- the political and military hierarchies -- are placed in a satiric context, characterized by dialogue which is devoid of the civilizing values found in poetry. His themes explore the collision of these two worlds -- one peaceful, one bellicose, the first a memory of paradise, the other a state devoid of grace. But unlike the fiction of Nikolai Ivanov, for example, the collision of these two worlds, portrayed in various symbolic dichotomies, is never didactic. Rather, Ermakov's stories focus on moral loss and spiritual transformation.

Chapter Nine

Oleg Ermakov (Part Three)

This chapter will discuss 'Znak zverya' ('The Sign of the Beast'), Ermakov's first full-length novel.[1] By coincidence, the book has appeared in Znamya soon after the fall of the Soviet-sponsored Najibullah regime in Afghanistan. As the victory of the mujahedin removes the last vestige of the Soviet war effort, so too does Ermakov's novel signal the culmination of a decade-long progress by Russian writers to account for the loss of the war. 'The Sign of the Beast' reinterprets various personae and events which have appeared in the author's previous works, but this novel also sets stylistic and thematic precedents for Afghan War fiction in general. And just as Prokhanov's writings were an indicator of evolving official interpretation of the war, so too may Ermakov's inclusion of previously taboo subjects chart the Soviet censor's loss of authority in the late 1980s. The last half of the chapter will provide two brief case studies illustrating this process, along with an exploration of Ermakov's recurring scenes, characters, and images.

'The Sign of the Beast' recounts in seven parts the two-year tour of duty in Afghanistan of an artillery spotter nicknamed Cherepakha ('Turtle').[2] Part One, 'The Easiest Duty' (3-36) documents the protagonist's daily work at a marble quarry under the twin-peaked Marble Mountain, and describes his thoughts while on sentry ('easy') duty. Ironically, it is during his night watch that Cherepakha fires at and kills one of two deserters from a Soviet reconnaissance unit. Part Two, 'The Sounds of Trumpets' (36-48) refers to morning reveille and documents life in the regimental camp. With allusions to the trumpeters of the Apocalypse (in Revelation 11. 19 as mentioned

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[1]Oleg Ermakov, 'Znak zverya', Znamya 6 (1992): 6-86 (the first part of a proposed two-part serialization). The second part is scheduled to be published in the July issue, according to a letter to the author received from Karen Stepanyan, Editor at Znamya, 6 May 1992. Since the novel has not been published in full at the time of this writing, in this chapter I use the text and page numbers in advance proofs kindly provided by William Swainson, Harvill Publishers. The numbers from the proofs of the first part are 3-83, and correspond to pages 6-86 in the June issue of Znamya.

[2]The time of the action seems to correspond to the author's period of duty in Afghanistan (1981-83). The new year which marks the approximate midpoint of Cherepakha's service is identified as the Year of the Pig (87), which would be the start of 1983 according to the Chinese calendar.

previously in 'Feast'), the hero's artillery battery destroys an Afghan village where the surviving Soviet defector seeks refuge. Part Three, 'The Operation' (49-83) depicts a long-range mission during which Cherepakha's regiment participates in battle. Part Four, 'New Year' (84-113) reveals the interior lives of several characters, including Evgeniya, the librarian, and an unnamed army doctor. Part Five, 'The Plain' (114-31) focuses on Cherepakha's attempt to cope with the stress of war and the guilt from having shot the deserter. This section also recounts the capture of the surviving Soviet deserter, who had disguised himself as a pale-skinned Nuristani. Part Six, 'The Woman' (132-47) recounts the hero's last mission of the war, and also describes the culmination of his spiritual journey, begun in Part Five, in the company of an imaginary female companion. Part Seven, 'Transfer' (147-57) concludes with the hero's demobilization and departure for home.

The novel's theme is the inhumanity of war, a communal activity which marks its participants with the 'sign of the beast'. The author uses institutional harassment (dedovshchina), endemic to the army, as one embodiment of this evil. As in his short stories, Ermakov depicts the four unofficial ranks which coincide with six-month periods of time in service: 'son', 'finch', 'pheasant', 'granddad' (16). The troops awaken in stages which correspond to their position in the hierarchy of privilege: 'the sons, having put on their boots, abandon their cubicle and move toward the door; the finches slip their legs into trousers; the pheasants still sit in their shorts, staring stupidly at the floor and scratching their heads; while the granddads have finally stirred, yawning under the blankets' (4). Ermakov shows that every aspect of their behaviour is similarly conditioned. 'After dinner, the sons silently wash the plates, the finches whisper to one another outside in the yard, while the pheasants and granddads laugh, cough, and talk in loud voices' (10). Additionally, the text reveals that the sons have collective and individual duties, both official and unofficial. Their official communal responsibilities include sewing undercollars, making beds and washing floors, while an example of an official individual task is the job of Mukhoboi ('Fly-killer') to remove

flies from the vats of food and coffee (6, 9).[3] Some demands are unofficial, such as the communal task of arranging a 'train journey' skit (13) similar to the one depicted in Yury Polyakov's story 'One Hundred Days Until the Order'.[4] And finally, an individual unofficial task is ordered on the spur of the moment, such as when Kol'ka is simultaneously ordered by two different granddads to fetch water and deliver a message (11). This last category of unofficial requests, apparently being subject to a negotiation process, seems to define the hierarchy within the ranks of the junior troops. The stronger sons, after perhaps weathering a beating, might well refuse certain unofficial demands, whereas the weaker boys would find their places as batmen for the senior troops.

This oppressive situation seems eternal and inviolable: 'And it hardly was imaginable that the finches could ever become pheasants, or sons change to finches -- it was difficult to hope for such a miracle. No, the sons will always be sons, and they will eternally wash their own plates and those of the others...' (10). Cherepakha's friend Boris calls dedovshchina a 'school for slavery' and imagines a transformation of society as expressed in John Lennon's song 'Revolution', in which individual altruistic effort is portrayed as being ethically superior to mass revolutionary activity (17). This beckoning dream tempts the sons to stage a coup against their senior masters (19-22). Unfortunately, united effort among the junior troops proves impossible; the granddads discover Cherepakha's role in the planned 'revolution' and physically punish him as a lesson to the others. His effort to end the self-perpetuating cycle of harrassment thus has failed. Later he will be shocked to witness Mukhoboi beating a new arrival for no apparent reason, just as they had been maltreated in their turn (94-95). Cherepakha ultimately does not blame the senior soldiers for following tradition; he agrees with his friend Boris, who blames the war for inculcating 'Asian barbarity' (15). More

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[3]Mukhoboi is upbraided for the appearance of a fly in a senior soldier's cup of coffee; note the actual persecution for a similar offence as cited in Chapter Three.

[4]The similarity indicates that the 'train journey' is a sort of army rite preceding homecoming. The impromptu skit may include variations according to those things which the 'traveller' misses most. Shubilaev's improvisations on the basic theme, for example, include requesting Mukhoboi to play the part of a girl boarding the train with a tape player, while he himself orders a cognac from the 'conductor'.

generally, Cherepakha views the individual as powerless against the destructive natural tendencies of collective society (29). It is this system which is blamed for the desertions of the two Soviet soldiers ('rumours were confirmed that the reconnaissance troops treated their first-year soldiers too harshly') (26). Harrassment, it is implied, is also to blame for desertions in general; myths concerning the fate of deserters are discussed by the old-timers in terms suggesting that the phenomenon was not rare (26).

Besides dedovshchina, Ermakov blames the stultifying effect of Party ideology for its role in destroying the spiritual lives of the soldiers. Ermakov's low-key attack on the Party is comprised of a series of ironic observations interspersed throughout the novel. A political lecture is interrupted by a Georgian named Besikoshvili, whose ungrammatical complaint that his pen has run dry ('ruchka perestal pisat") emphasizes the dubious quality of his assiduous notes, and by implication, of the vacuous speech. Furthermore, the lecture itself is presented to the reader through the filter of Cherepakha's consciousness, so that only disconnected phrases of Marxist rhetoric penetrate the hero's simultaneous, and far more alluring, recollection of a train ride in the Russian countryside (23). The political officer later notes that the regimental pigsty would make a more suitable Lenin Room than their existing hastily constructed shack. The author's juxtaposition implicitly compares Soviet army and society to a piggery which is ruled by a tyrannical boar, who incidentally feeds from his own separate trough (53). And the Party's struggle to counter popular demand for what it considers subversive literature is revealed in the librarian's lament: 'I order Remarque, and they send Fadeev; Dostoevsky, they deliver Gorky; instead of poems, they send brochures; instead of Lermontov, we get Isaev and Isakovsky' (104).[5] The Party is distinguished only by the material privileges its members enjoy, as when rumours are confirmed that soldiers who are Communist Party members have priority in flying home (132). This

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[5]Egor (Georgy) Isaev (1926-) is a World War Two veteran and poet, winner of a 1980 Lenin Prize, and a former secretary of the Soviet Writers' Union. Mikhail Isakovsky (1900-1973) was a poet and patriotic songwriter, also a member of the Writers' Union. The works of both men are considered politically orthodox. See Wolfgang Kasak, Entsiklopedicheskii slovar' russkoi literatury s 1917 goda (London: Overseas Publications Interchange, 1988) 326-27.

discovery prompts one man to complain wryly that if he had known of this benefit, he would have applied for membership also (134).[6]

Ermakov's third motif for portraying 'the sign of the beast' is combat. During a battle, the soldiers in the artillery battery are caught up in such a frenzy of firing that they no longer hear their officer's orders; their faces are 'wet, filthy, and rabid' (osatanelymi) (47). In another barrage, their frantic movements are likened to the gestures of absurd 'clowns' (129). Yet another scene shows soldiers in action, not against the enemy, but rather as looters of a defenceless market bazaar (127). And rather than presenting infantry combat from the tactical point of view, Ermakov depicts Cherepakha's confusion, loss of orientation, and sensory overload, despite the fact that during the day-long battle (for which he has volunteered as radio operator), 'he had not yet seen even one of the mountain defenders either dead or alive' (74). In one of the shortest subsections of the novel, Ermakov writes:

> The column departed from the regiment and for two weeks sailed through the dust and the sun, crept through mountain passes, sank into starry nights, rammed through clay walls, put its red horns into the eyes of houses, ripped up the earth's cloak of wheat with its treads, and with a cry, clawed at the mountain slopes. (136)

Ermakov's ultimate portrayal of the obscenity of war is a graphic depiction in which Senior Lieutenant Osadchy executes the mujahedin prisoners, then urinates into the mouth of one of the dead victims (113). Whether using metaphorical or realistic language, regardless of emphasis on viciousness or absurdity, Ermakov's fictional world of war is a physical and moral inferno.

To underscore the destruction, Ermakov briefly traces the effects of past invasions on the nearby village of Kar'yakhamad (43-44). But he is notably meticulous in placing the Soviet forces within this broader historical context. The author recounts the cyclical destruction and rehabilitation of the village during three wars with the British, and the call to arms of several generations of Afghans defending their land.

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[6] A soldier observes that out of three artillery batteries, only one man, a Chechen teacher, is a candidate member of the Party (134).

And once again in summer the orchards rustled with an abundance of fruit; the valley has a beneficent climate, and the fruit here is so heavy with juice, that to this day at the Kandahar, Gazni, and Kabul bazaars, buyers flock to the merchant selling Kar'yakhamad apples and plums... But the Inglizy returned, once again they walked along the road from Kandahar to Kabul... (43)

This short lyrical interlude concludes with the unexpected appearance of one of the defecting Soviet soldiers (44), whose arrival foreshadows the next round of destruction for the town, this time by Soviet artillery fire (48). This incorporation of the past into the soldiers' present struggle is made at the symbolic level when an imaginary bird creature with the palindromic name Ptitsa Atsit describes the tramp of Macedonian soldiers, Persian chariots, Mongolian horses, the war cries of the British -- adding, 'and now comes a column from your country along this blazing path' (101). Thus Ermakov portrays the Russians as taking their place in a continuing historical sequence of imperial armies which eventually retreat from Afghanistan. Such historical allusions have been a relatively uncommon characteristic of Afghan War literature; official Soviet writers probably were loath to mention previous imperial invasions for fear that readers might draw parallels with those invasions to the Red Army incursion, which ostensibly was sent not to conquer the nation but to protect a fledgling revolution. Ermakov's historicity thus broadens the imaginative context of the war, allowing readers to interpret and compare the Soviet experience to those of other nations and other eras.[7]

Ermakov also uses point-of-view to present the Russian army as a foreign intruder in Afghanistan. As in his short stories, the author portrays characters from the perspective of an omniscient narrator who might be described as an observant yet alien Russian. In the scene of the village sweep, for example, where Afghan informants could be carrying out personal vendettas instead of identifying actual mujahedin (77), the reader is given no information about the village suspects which is not available to the Soviet characters. Yet this technique of supplying only partial information to the reader is effective in conveying emotions felt by the Afghans, and even in differentiating character. When told of their imminent execution, for example, the

[7]On a related theme, Ermakov's use of an introductory epigram to the novel (quoting Revelation 14. 11) signals a desire to have his experiences, and his fiction, interpreted as possessing broader significance than as a simple account of combat in a distant locale.

prisoners methodically set about their prayers, while one man in apparent hysteria refuses to cease his supplications (82). Moreover, Ermakov's portrayal of the nomads includes a rare reference in Afghan fiction to Pushtunwali, the unwritten cultural code of behaviour among the proud Pushtuns.[8] 'The men are never separated from their weapons ... and the nomad women cover their faces for no man' (59-60). The opaque surface of Afghan culture is penetrated to some degree by the omniscient narrator's observations concerning the Soviets themselves. The political officer's speech to the villagers, delivered in Ermakov's practised parodic style, is the author's method not only of showing the futility of such an exercise, but also of suggesting the villagers' lack of identification with such concepts as 'hirelings of imperialism' and 'apprentices of American special forces' (77). Conversely, the kindness of an old man in an abandoned village is conveyed by his attempt to fulfill Cherepakha's request for the narcotic chars (121-2) with the unacceptable substitute naswar.[9] This act earns a rebuke from Cherepakha, who becomes disgusted with the failed transaction. The outsider's point of view emphasizes the protagonist's inability to communicate with the old man, and this in turn underscores the lack of information and sense of suspicion which the Soviets experienced in Afghanistan.[10] One final observation by an omniscient narrator who uses only objective observations demonstrates the alien nature of the Russians on Afghan soil. That is the explicit contrast between the Pushtun nomads travelling south in their yearly migration, and the Soviet columns rumbling north on their own peregrinations. These diverging paths cross in an image of a barefoot woman walking past an armoured multi-tonned tracked vehicle (83). This motif is foreshadowed in 'Safe Return', where the lorry driver extols the independence of the nomads, and criticizes the treatment given a gypsy who once served in his army unit. In that story, the driver concludes by comparing freedom-loving wanderers with

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[8]Nikolai Ivanov also refers to Pushtunvalai, but only in an historical section of his 'novel-chronicle'. See 'Ogranichennyi kontingent' 17.

[9]'Naswar: a tobacco-based substance, cut with other spices, resembling snuff'. Hodson 220.

[10]The one exception to this point of view is the revelation of the mullah's confused thoughts as he gradually regains consciousness after the artillery barrage, and then rages at the destruction of his village (48).

slavish, domesticated Russians: 'The gypsies. They spit on anything. A horse, a whip and the wind. And we're just mules' ('Safe Return' 162). His comment forms an indirect, ironic contrast between two types of nomads which is made explicit in 'Sign of the Beast': the independent Pushtuns with their flocks of sheep migrating between pasture lands, and the suspicious Soviets confined mainly to paved roads, ferrying soldiers and arms.[11]

Set against the evils of communal warfare is the potentially redemptive internal life of the individual. This aspect of life in the regimental camp is expressed in three dreams, each belonging to a separate character, and each, perhaps, reflecting alternative means of accommodating to the psychological and spiritual stresses of war. The first dream belongs to Evgeniya, the librarian, and is expressed in religious imagery (99-102). She has an imaginary dialogue with a figure whose name seems to be derived from the Russian word for lime- or linden-tree (Lip, lipovyi), whose soft wood she imagines being carved into icons (100). This figure seems to represent religious salvation in the person of Andrei Rublev, the medieval Russian icon painter; but the figure, whose bloodstained feet Evgeniya offers to bandage, also resembles Christ. Set against this saintly image are the soldiers -- Macedonians, Persians, Mongolians, British, and now Russians -- who are condemned throughout history to wear the 'sign of the beast', which is written on their faces with the blood they spill (102). And as Ermakov uses Andrei Rublev to symbolize salvation, he seems to use the bird Ptitsa Atsit as a symbol for apocalyptic upheaval.[12] These two symbolic entities engage in polemic concerning the morality and efficacy of violent versus non-violent means of achieving ultimate goals. The debate remains unresolved in Evgeniya's mind as she awakens from her nightmare. But since the voice of apocalypse has the final word in the argument, it is evident that religion is not presented as the unequivocal absolution to Evgeniya's guilt.

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[11] Although by moonlight, a Soviet barracks tent might be mistaken for the tent of 'a nomadic tribe which had migrated from ancient Palestine' ('Beast' 5).

[12] At one point, an actual bird similar to the symbolic creature hovers like an omen over the camp, drawing gunfire from the uneasy soldiers until it drifts away (120).

The second (waking) dream belongs to an unnamed army doctor, and seems to advance the claims of scientific rationalism to assuage the stress of war. This dream is expressed in terms of the doctor's internal 'dialogue' with an imaginary psychoanalyst (97-98). It concerns his guilt caused by a sexual liaison with a nurse, an act of her prostitution and his adultery for which he promises to pay seven hundred rubles (70). His 'therapist' resorts to Freudian analysis to uncover the cause of the doctor's 'neurosis'. The imagined cure is expressed through a series of elliptical prescriptions which end as the doctor falls asleep: 'Relaxation, tranquillizers ... and it's imperative ... to make clear ... that in nature ... there is absolutely nothing ... mystical ... and not to think about that whore ... She isn't ... worth it ... to sleep. Sleep...' (98). If Ermakov uses this scene to investigate rationalism as a palliative to guilt, then again, as with religion, the answer seems to prove inadequate.

The third dream sequence belongs to Cherepakha, but seems to employ private rather than collective images to portray the hero's desire to escape from Afghanistan. The world of war is symbolized in this dream universe by a vast plain ('Ravnina', the title of Part Five) upon which the hero is marooned (8, 79, 118), and which corresponds to the Kandahar plain where the regimental city is located. Cherepakha associates the plain with the dehumanizing camp routine (123); he imagines that he has spent 'a thousand years marching in place' (137). He is frightened of this terrible expanse which threatens to engulf his mind, and he avoids sleep in order not to become lost within it (121).[13] The resolution occurs when later he dreams of a woman ('Zhenshchina', the title of Part Six) who approaches him from across the plain (135).

[13]Related to the function of the 'plain' is the symbolic role of boundaries, either of the camp or of the plain. These boundaries appear to separate not only geographical regions, but to draw a line between life and death as well. For example, in 'Safe Return' Orshev says 'amen' when passing through the perimeter checkpoint on his way home; and the Kabul transfer point in 'Sign of the Beast' is described as 'the gates of peace and the gates of war' (154), depending on one's direction of travel. In the novel, the soldiers working in the quarry sink 'into a yellow cosmos, and will never reach the border' (8), that is, they will never escape from their labours to live a normal life. Likewise, this conception of 'borders' seems to be present in Lermontov's short story 'Taman', when Pechorin steps past the sentry box and suddenly finds himself in another world, seemingly governed by different laws of nature. Of course, Ermakov and Lermontov assign opposite values to these respective 'territories': Cherepakha and Orshev seek to escape from the army and its territory of death, whereas Pechorin, a brusque military officer, finds himself on dangerous and unpredictable territory only if he travels beyond the sentry box. Nevertheless, the imaginative construct of the 'border' is especially evocative in a military context.

This woman, who takes various forms and names ('Morning Cow') (139), may symbolize the non-violent ethos of personal freedom personified in John Lennon, whom Cherepakha earlier imagines as presiding like a shepherd over a herd of 'white cows') (18). She leads him on a homeward journey toward a land with trees, northern winds, and an Eastern Ocean (136, 142).[14] Consistent with the motif of homecoming found throughout Ermakov's works, this phantasmagoric trek may symbolize not only the hero's desired return to Russia, but also his hope for personal redemption. The protagonist's spiritual journey draws to an ominous close, however, when his female companion sees not a seagull from the Eastern Sea, but the bird (Ptitsa Atsit) which portends violence and moral collapse. Hence, none of these attempts at personal redemption are successful, and the entire occupying army in Afghanistan seems marked with 'the sign of the beast'.

Ermakov describes this interior world of individual perceptions with stylistic markers that sometimes disregard standard syntax. He often employs phonemic spellings ('tashchstashnant' for 'tovarishch starshii leitenant' (23), or 'aa! vich! aa! aa! shch! ra! l!' for 'Zdravstvuite, tovarishch general') (55). He employs repetition of words to convey the hallucinatory onset of physical illness ('Well. Well. Well I don't know don't know don't know' etc.) (32), or continuous phrases without punctuation to portray a sleeper awakening from a drug-induced torpor ('Nothing audible only breathing sweat on face on back along legs was walking walks walk along the silent soundless fragmented warm sky' etc.) (79). Ermakov sometimes suggests a subjectively perceived pattern with its syntactical equivalent, such as the cyclical motion of heavenly bodies: 'the sun shines on the artillery battery from where, that night, had shone the moon' (5). He also employs extended sentences to portray forays into the fantastic, such as his conception of an imaginary, Gogolian sandstorm wreaking absurd havoc on the camp: objects ('wires, telephone, red folders') and people ('Officers, 'pheasants', 'sons', demobbed soldiers') fly about in a mad whirlwind (138). These

[14]The Eastern Ocean may also symbolize tranquillity, derived from its first mention in the context of a Chinese lyric poem (25).

stylistic devices underscore the primacy Ermakov gives to the unbridled imaginative perception.[15]

Ermakov loads his novel with the most comprehensive documentation of a soldier's life in Afghanistan which has so far been provided in fiction. After having lived through nearly a decade of government-imposed silence on the war, the author seems to want to publicize the experiences of veterans simply in order to heal the wounds of alienation. But Ermakov's documentation also presents the social evils which penetrated the army, so the novel inevitably comments on society as well as on the military. Thus, regardless of the author's intention, even the slightest of details may perform two functions: it informs the reader, but it also passes implicit moral judgement on its subject.

For example, the reader learns that the soldiers' breakfast consisted of oatmeal seasoned with bay leaf and salt, but Ermakov adds that all meals tasted of the chlorine used to clean the vats in which the food was cooked.[16] Ermakov's documentation reveals an underground economy with its own laws of demand and supply in which coffee was not the only liquid refreshment available. In a regimental camp, a soldier might run an unofficial brewery for his compatriots, producing home-made beer (braga) (132). There might also be an unofficial alcohol distillery producing samogon of much higher proof than that of the officers' vodka; in Ermakov's novel, a Ukrainian NCO supplies the camp commander on a regular basis (86).[17] From other sources it is known that free cigarettes were issued to Soviet soldiers; Ermakov informs the reader that these monthly eighteen-pack allotments consisted of Russian papirosy made of cheap makhorka tobacco, lacking filters, and producing a 'sour, stinking' taste. The

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[15]The author acknowledges Gogol by name, and compares the absurdity of the camp inspection to The Inspector General, and the smooth snowy surface of Marble Mountain in winter to Gogol's unfortunate collegiate assessor from 'The Nose' (102-03).

[16]Other details add to the impression of food which was of generally low quality. Field rations include 'stavrida' (fish) in tomato sauce, and 'kleister', a powdered potato purée. One Georgian refuses to eat rather than suffer the consequent heartburn (65).

[17]The officer clearly plans on turning the Ukrainian's job into a camp institution: 'I'm going to tell that 'top-knot' (khokhol) that if he doesn't learn how to make champagne by next New Year's Day, the son of a bitch will have as much chance of seeing his own demobilization date as he has of seeing his own ears!' (86)

regimental camp commissary might sell higher quality filter cigarettes, but these cigarettes were proscribed by the senior troops for soldiers with less than six months' active service (12). Illicit deliveries of anasha and opium entered the camp in much the same fashion as approved commodities such as flour, tobacco, mail, and building materials (51): via the bimonthly supply convoys from Kabul. (Ermakov wryly observes that the reconnaissance company, which obtained narcotics during regular patrols, by itself could not provide a sufficient quantity of drugs for the entire regiment.) (54) Additionally, Ermakov goes beyond the previous laconic references in his short stories when describing the consumption of illegal drugs. When the rare opportunity arises to buy eau-de-cologne at the commissary store, for example, the author observes that the glasshouse is filled to capacity soon afterward; the soldiers distill the cologne for its alcohol (37). He also describes in detail the procedure used to roll a cigarette made of anasha, including mixing the narcotic with tobacco, refilling the cigarette shell, and adding a self-made paper filter (54). He details a ritual known as 'the lighthouse' (mayak) wherein one man inhales through the filter while another blows through the opposite end while trying to avoid burning his lips on the ash (132). These descriptions not only shed light on soldiers' customs in that war, but also underline their difficult living conditions, and the methods they used to escape, if only artificially, from their oppressive situation.[18]

In a final instance of documentation laden with more profound social implications, a seemingly innocuous mention of salaries reveals that the lowest ranking officers received twenty times the monthly income of conscripts (two hundred checks versus nine checks) (37). This inequity is magnified by the fact that soldiers were compelled to spend their incomes at the commissary store for discretionary items, such as juice, jam, cakes, and filter cigarettes, whereas officers received rations of food

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[18]The prevalence of drug abuse may be inferred from the relatively light punishment (three days' imprisonment) which is imposed on offenders ('Sign of the Beast', 37). The context of reference in 'Safe Return' also makes clear the quotidian nature of illegal drug use: 'For two years the return had been their favourite topic: they imagined it aloud in contented tones while on night watch, after a battle, or in the evening around a fire behind the bathhouse, where they usually baked potatoes, drank tea and smoked anasha' (156).

(condensed milk, tinned cheese, stew) and filter cigarettes in addition to their regular salary. In this context, it comes as no surprise that theft of goods for resale on the black market was widespread, earning the miscreant from three to ten days in the glasshouse depending on the item stolen. (The most heavily punished, and widely committed, infraction was fighting with an officer, which earned fifteen days.) Understandably, nothing -- condensed milk, boots, diesel fuel, medicine, gas masks, flour ('the barbed wire fence surrounding the bakery was flour and yeast permeable', which would account for supplies used to brew braga), spare motor parts, hand grenades -- was safe from theft (37).

This novel marks Ermakov's first incorporation of central female characters into a story taking place in Afghanistan. While these characters add authenticity to Ermakov's narrative, they also personify notions of good and evil for the soldiers. On one level, Evgeniya, the librarian, is portrayed realistically: she discusses various strategies for social survival at the camp with her more experienced room-mate Katya (39), and she falls in love with Osadchy, whose soul, if not wit, has been deadened by war (104). Yet her popularity from the first day of her arrival marks her as a symbol of potential beneficence in the eyes of the men. As librarian she is associated with a literate consciousness, which in Ermakov's fiction is the equivalent to civilizing, moral values. Her dream of Andrei Rublev further identifies her as a source of moral good, and she mourns the suicide of the young soldier who worked as the movie projectionist (40). Finally, the imaginary creature Ptitsa Atsit which first appears in Evgeniya's dream also appears in Cherepakha's flight of fancy. Thus, Evgeniya could be identified as the hero's beneficent female companion and guide.

In contrast to Evgeniya is the nurse, known only by her nickname ('Sestra-s-kosoi') for her braided hair. The third-person narrator describes her as the prettiest of the seven women at the regimental city, yet this pulchritude indicates temptation rather than inspiration. Since she is the only woman to accompany the regiment on campaign, some of the superstitious men view her participation in combat as an evil omen (64). Furthermore, after pressing himself upon this nurse, the doctor becomes obsessed with

death. 'I have long suspected that there is a connection between her and the death of several officers', he confides to his imaginary therapist (97). 'Her eyes were black, like black holes in space', he muses (98). He also associates her with death because of the blood on her gown from working in the medical tent (98). In this case, Ermakov chooses to portray a realistically flawed character -- the nurse earns money from prostitution -- as a screen upon which the men project their sexual aggression and fear of death.

'The Sign of the Beast' displays several thematic and stylistic traits which are characteristic of the author's short stories. These traits include Ermakov's anti-war sentiment, the dissection of institutionalized harassment in the army, and his continuing attack on the dehumanizing legacy of Party control over Soviet society. His preference for character delineation through dream exposition, and his tendency to experiment with neologisms, non-standard syntax, and stream of consciousness also find expression in his latest work. At the same time, Ermakov has used the novel's expanded format to introduce motifs which heretofore have appeared only in embryonic form in his previous works of fiction. For example, he introduces central female characters, and he incorporates for the first time on a broad scale both objective documentation and historic context. And unlike his short stories, which often concentrate on one individual, the author has constructed a 'polyphonic' novel by focusing on several characters. For example, point of view is not confined to one major protagonist; the omniscient narrator reveals various characters in equal depth, if not breadth. On one hand, this feature rules out emphasis on the group as 'hero', which would describe a 'platoon' story; on the other, the character of Cherepakha seems to function as a unifying theme, or a narrative centre of gravity, rather than as a compelling study of one individual.

In his first novel, Ermakov has decided to combine character study with broad-based documentary. In this sense, the book resembles 'One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich', wherein Soviets were finally allowed, or compelled, to integrate the

experience of the Stalinist labour camps into the life of the nation.[19] And just as the labour camp victims themselves were permitted to integrate the experience into their own lives with the mirror provided by Solzhenitsyn's fiction, so might Ermakov's novel aim to play the same cathartic function for Afghan veterans. His literature may also be compared to other works of fiction from different eras, and even different nations, which portray the absurdity of war. Thus, as the Russo-Japanese War was evoked in Leonid Andreev's nightmarish Red Laughter, and the insanity of the Vietnam War finds expression in Larry Heinemann's Paco's Story,[20] Ermakov's novel provides a bridge connecting contemporary Russian fiction with traditional anti-war motifs found in twentieth-century western literature.

It is by now obvious that 'The Sign of the Beast' is in many respects a compilation of details which have been recovered, and in some instances reinterpreted, from earlier short stories. Thus, at the outset of the following discussion on Ermakov's work taken as a whole, common attributes might be noted concerning location, characterization, and imagery found in the novel as well as the short stories. For example, the small artillery battery with armoury attached (33) is found not only in 'The Sign of the Beast' but also in 'Simply Autumn'. Cherepakha's tent can be seen in 'Winter in Afghanistan', and the novel's regimental city features in both 'Safe Return' and 'Yellow Mountain'; the latter even refers obliquely to Marble Mountain (115-16), which occupies a prominent place in the later novel's geography. The first account of combat in the novel (71) takes place on a mountain slope which resembles the fortified mujahedin position in 'Unit X', and the final customs inspection, complete with the same dust storm (147), may be seen in 'Feast'. Additionally, certain events are re-incorporated into the novel as well. The final mujahedin mortar attack of 'Sign of the Beast' (148) also occurs in 'Safe Return', and dedovshchina as portrayed in the novel is earlier blamed for a similar AWOL incident in 'Winter in Afghanistan'.

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[19]The resemblance extends to the narrative level in the novel's opening episode (6-9) when Ermakov describes the work detail sent to the marble quarry.

[20]Larry Heinemann, Paco's Story (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).

Characterization in the short stories also shares common points with the protagonists of the novel. Cherepakha's dreams of a forest haven with pike splashing in a stream (14) evoke the central character of 'Simply Autumn'. Cherepakha's friend Boris (17), who is selected for the reconnaissance company, is probably based on the same man as Fedya's friend in 'Yellow Mountain': both are separated from the respective central characters through selection to a reconnaissance unit. Evgeniya, the librarian, and Katya, the typist, have their respective prototypes in Tanya and Valya of 'Winter in Afghanistan'. Kol'ka, the meek boy who tends the pigs in the novel, is a variant of the religiously inclined Stodolya also of the latter short story, each being sent for water by a granddad ('Beast' 11; 'Winter' 97). Moreover, some characters seem to be composites. The tyrannical Major Akimov of 'Yellow Mountain', who comes under suspicion from higher headquarters because of disciplinary problems within his unit, seems to be a composite of two characters in 'Sign of the Beast': the young commander from the paratroopers who makes similar surprise visits on sentry posts (84), and the unfortunate Colonel Krabov, who delivers agitprop speeches similar to Akimov's and is fired from his job for his regiments' disciplinary infractions (46). Indeed, the predatory Major Akimov appears in the initial dream of 'Safe Return': Akimov and the imaginary general both sweep clean a table laden with food.

Ermakov invests a majority of his central protagonists with a literary inclination, indeed a marked predilection for Eastern philosophy and ancient history, as well as French and Russian symbolist poets. If Ermakov has studied Taoism, that philosophy of 'unassertive action and retirement from the world'[21] would certainly find resonance in the author's own predilection for isolation, as well as in his protagonists' love of dreams and nature. Both Cherepakha (14, 25, 57) and Stodolya of 'Winter in Afghanistan' (99) are drawn to Chinese poetry. Additionally, the heroine of 'The Snow-Covered House' at one point characterizes marriage in terms of the yin and yang of traditional Chinese cosmology (125). In 'Sign of the Beast', the doctor muses upon

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[21]See Webster's Third New International Dictionary (Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1971).

texts from the Egyptian Book of the Dead (97); Evgeniya proves to be an expert on ancient Zoroastrian beliefs (90); Boris makes humorous allusions to Greek mythology (30). Literariness is especially prominent in 'Yellow Mountain', where the text refers to nearly a dozen writers: Esenin, Garshin, Bulgakov, Verlaine, Villon, Rimbaud, Blok, Bunin, Evtushenko, and Baudelaire. In fact, the moment when Fedya's brief military career falters is also placed in a literary context. When the dilettante Major Akimov calls Blok's poetry 'crystal', Pryadil'nikov utters without thinking, 'yes, definitely not iron', perhaps alluding to the contrast between the values embodied in an occupying army and the values expressed in Blok's poetry. This ironic retort turns the major into an enemy, and signifies the difference in values of the two men.

Ermakov's characterization of females, however, seems dependent on setting. In the domestic story of 'The Snow-Covered House', the author delineates sex roles in classic patriarchal terms, with the heroine continuing a nineteenth-century Russian prototype. Here the author presents a reincarnation of Pushkin's Tatyana, who is innocent at heart, strong in spirit. Even in difficult circumstances, the young wife is outwardly self-assured, remaining chaste and sober throughout her husband's tour of duty in Afghanistan. This characterization applies also to the heroine in 'Spring Stroll', which takes place in the Soviet Union, and Stodolya's lover who remains behind in 'Winter in Afghanistan'. On a symbolic level, too, Ermakov generally uses the feminine image to represent purified love -- of friends, of country, and of nature. His neologism 'crane-woman' (zhurazhenshchina) ('Yellow Mountain', 114), for example, connects the feminine image with innocence, and a symbol of the homeland. Another imaginary association is drawn between the feminine cranes and Liza, the object of the protagonist's affections: 'Too bad that Liza didn't arrive. Liza, Liza, liz-liz-liz...the black birds flew in...' (116). It is true that Liza, a married woman, seems tempted by Fedya's desperate offer to start a love affair, and she is no stranger to the potentially violent street life of the city. She nevertheless plays the role of rescuer, and remains unsullied in various encounters with morally degenerate men. Except for Liza, these stereotypical female characterizations stand in contrast to the author's depiction of

women in Afghanistan (Valya in 'Winter in Afghanistan', the nurse in 'Sign of the Beast') in which domestic chastity and control over one's life is displaced by prostitution and combat duty. Thus the war is portrayed as a defining spiritual experience not only for the male combatants but for the women who work at the military bases. The figure of Evgeniya in 'Sign of the Beast' is perhaps an example of Ermakov's attempt to combine these images in a single realistic female characterization. Evgeniya is a flawed human being, destined to be spiritually marked by her experience of war (her lover Osadchy is killed in action, 113), yet she struggles with the moral implications of participation in war as shown in her dream of Andrei Rublev.

One final point might be added concerning the image of women in Ermakov's fiction. His stories reflect the fact that for the majority of soldiers, social or sexual contact with Soviet -- to say nothing of Afghan -- women was minimal. Demonstration of this may be found in the soldiers' conversation in 'Feast', which contains no references to romantic liaisons with the indigenous population, or with Soviet women in the Afghan contingent (115). This isolation seems to have resulted in a particular permutation of the male exploitation of the female image: various scenes in Ermakov's stories depict an 'interrogation' of a newly-arrived conscript concerning the details of his love life ('The Sign of the Beast' 125; 'Winter in Afghanistan' 99; 'Baptism' 97; 'Simply Autumn' 57). Thus the feminine image in Ermakov's depiction of Afghanistan represents yet one more social set of relations which is distorted by the institution of dedovshchina.

Shared imagery is also found throughout his stories. The image of a horse being attacked by gadflies, first used in 'Spring Stroll' (86), is repeated at the outset of his novel (3) to represent Cherepakha's fear of scorpions, spiders, and insects. This image evokes a more general sense of threat engendered by the war; hence, Ermakov elsewhere indulges in metaphors from the insect world. Besides 'mosquito-aeroplanes', 'worm-trains' (16), his novel includes an extended metaphor for the transformation of the Asian spring to summer: 'the summer greedily stuck its sun-ray proboscis into the clear, succulent, delicate spring, and quickly sucked out its delicate

aromas, colours, and green ichor' (119). The author also compares this seasonal transformation with a human chrysalis, only in reverse: 'from within the green virgin skin crawled an old woman' (15). These images underscore the omnipresent anxiety of combat, and also, perhaps, suggest a schizophrenic quality in Ermakov's perception of the war, as if unconsciously he is debating about the origin of sin, and where to place blame.

One notable omission in Ermakov's imagery concerns the legacy of World War Two. Ermakov's references to the Great Patriotic War are minimal. The commander in 'The Sign of the Beast' justifies serving illegal samogon to the four soldiers who have received awards, on the grounds that Russian troops in World War Two suffered no loss of discipline despite being allowed to drink alcohol (116). But this comment elicits no response from the soldiers, as if the commander is speaking a dead language which has no meaning for them. Also, the afgantsy are disappointed at having a live performance of a woman acrobat replaced by an 'old, boring' film about the past war (121). This is consistent with Ermakov's modern context which draws upon images of post-World War Two pacifism. He prefers the relatively contemporary lyrics of John Lennon (the whimsical 'yellow submarine' (17) symbolizes a self-contained world of one's friends with no outside influences) to hoary images of selfless Soviet war heroism. To cite another example, in 'Kolokol'nya', Ermakov portrays the protagonist looking out over the Smolensk road, and ruminating on Napoleon's advance. Depite the opportunity, the author chooses not to allude to the Nazi invasion. This reluctance to draw from the extensive mythology of the Great Patriotic War is consistent with his condemnation of the Soviet military hierarchy in general. In 'Yellow Mountain', the protagonist refuses to give the Army-Navy Day speech, accuses Zavsepech of characterizing his memoirs as anti-Soviet (which in fact they are) (107), and declares at one point, 'I was sick of army commanders and political officers' (112). It must be noted, however, that despite the dearth of images drawn from the earlier war, Ermakov employs one theme common to World War Two literature in his story 'Mars and the

Soldier': the sacredness of the memory of slain soldiers, and the portrayal of the homeland as the repository of those memories.

The detail devoted to the smoking of anasha ('Beast', 54, 78, 132) is yet another contrast to the Soviet experience of World War Two as described in fiction. Smoking has always figured prominently in Soviet war literature; Tvardovsky identifies stout makhorka tobacco with the motherland in his narrative World War Two poem Vasily Terkin.[22] And tobacco was not the only intoxicant used by the soldiers in that conflict; it has already been noted that vodka was legally consumed by soldiers during most of the Great Patriotic War. Thus, the replacement in Russian literature of Homo Sovieticus and his grand ideals with the humbler homo fumificus interested only in a cigarette before the next battle is not something newly introduced by Ermakov.[23] During the war in Afghanistan, however, anasha grew to compete in popularity with tobacco, and the potato was displaced by the poppy and the hemp plant. Consequently, vodka and makhorka as symbols of the motherland are replaced in Ermakov's stories with substances which symbolize foreign cultures and spiritual alienation.[24] They seem appropriate icons for the Soviet war in Afghanistan.

Ermakov's propensity for stream of consciousness and non-standard syntax has already been noted, but neither should his exploitation of simpler stylistic devices be ignored. Two such basic elements are the author's use of sound and rhythm. In 'Yellow Mountain', Ermakov's onomatopoeic descriptions convey the sizzling and smell of breakfast cooking: 'Skovorodka nagrelas', on opustil v nee kusok slivochnogo masla, maslo bystro rastopilos', i v zheltuyu pennuyu luzhitsu vyskol'znuli tri yaitsa, vypukhlykh, bledno-zheltykh, podernutykh, prozrachnoi sliz'yu' (103). The reader hears the butter bubbling, and the eggs hitting the frying pan

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[22]More specifically, a missing tobacco pouch. Aleksandr Tvardovsky, 'O potere', in Vasily Terkin (Moscow: Russkii yazik, 1976) 76-80.

[23]From a 'wise uncle' quoted by a character in Ermakov's 'Yellow Mountain' (115): 'a human is a creature which has no feathers, walks on two legs, and smokes'.

[24]Before the war, anasha apparently was used generally only by natives of Central Asia, where the crop is cultivated. See Canada, Department of National Defence, Warsaw Pact: The Question of Cohesion, Phase II, vol. III: USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and Hungary; Bibliography. By Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, and others. Operational Research and Analysis Establishment, Extra-Mural Paper No. 29 (Ottawa: DND, March 1986) 195.

with a hiss, one by one. Other examples of sentence phrases split to convey separate motions may also be found, such as when Fedya starts his automobile: 'Pryadil'nikov proter tryapkoi zatumannye stekla, sel, povernul klyuch zazhiganiya, progrel motor, vklyuchil pervuyu skorost', tronulsya' (104). The reader notes every movement required to start the car, and feels the shift in gear, something to which a disabled person dependent on motorized transportation might be especially sensitive.[25] These and other examples may be cited as evidence of Ermakov's ability to vividly transmit physical sensation, and consequently setting, perception, and mood, to the reader.

Ermakov's reworkings do not reflect a readily discernible pattern, but seem rather to support the particular narratives in which each variant is found. In 'Simply Autumn', for example, a soldier requests a song based on 'a [Moscow] tavern [cycle] poem from Esenin' (57) to emphasize the rough-and-ready nature of companionship at the small outpost, and as contrast to the central character's preference for lyricism. Conversely, in the novel, an officer requests a song based on 'something lyrical by Esenin' during the New Year's party to portray the command element of the social hierarchy (88). In the final mujahedin mortar attack of 'Safe Return', Orshev's dream of screaming soldiers conveys his psychological state, whereas the identical final attack in 'Sign of the Beast' actually scores a near-hit on the pigsty (149). The latter attack in the novel changes the focus from personal to communal loss; from pathos to dark comedy; and also takes advantage of earlier associations of the pigsty with Soviet society, and the embodiment of the 'beast' in the boar which runs amok. A final case is the flight home in 'Safe Return', replicated at the end of the novel. Where Orshev's anxiety and anticipation are expressed in the short story by his cry 'Almost there!' ('gop, gop!') as a release of psychological tension, the novel's much more somber concluding sentence emphasizes spiritual loss: 'And the sacrifice is completed' (157).[26] Taken as a whole, the author's continual process of remoulding events

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[25]One of the legal entitlements of veterans with leg disabilities is a Zaporozhets automobile (similar to the one owned by Pryadil'nikov) equipped with special hand controls. See Dynin, Posle Afganistana 136.

[26]The latest reprint of "Safe Return' carries the revised title 'Kheppi End'. See Oleg Ermakov, "Kheppi End," L. Teplov 435.

conveys the impression that the experience of Afghanistan is ultimately dependent on individual perception, which may vary not only among different observers, but for the same observer over time.

An important feature of Ermakov's narratives is their documentary value about a war which received so little publicity. Some of the details found in the novel have been discussed, but this type of documentation concerning the soldiers' harsh moral and physical environment is found from his earliest works. In 'Safe Return', for example, the author provides a poignant contrast to official Soviet propaganda at the time of the story's action (probably in the early 1980s) about the success of their pacification of the countryside, and certainly the security of the capital area. Attacks on a major Soviet installation, such as the one depicted at the end of the story, provide the reason why, by 1987, Kabul was ringed with three concentric defensive perimeters of ever more stringent security checks extending twenty miles from the city centre.[27] Also in 'Safe Return', Orshev notes his good fortune in catching an aeroplane which is scheduled to fly to Orenburg, Minsk and Moscow, but his luck only highlights the transportation problems encountered by returning soldiers.[28] The usual first stop for demobilized soldiers was Tashkent, after which each soldier arranged his own transportation home. The authorial aside notes that in winter this posed little problem, but in the busier summer months the men usually were forced to spend several days arranging their own transportation. In fact, this humiliating delay in Tashkent forms the basis of Ermakov's short story 'A Feast on the Banks of the Violet River'. Other details from his works reveal problems in Soviet discipline and training. In 'Yellow Mountain', low morale is implied when Akimov's lieutenant suggests that a disobedient sergeant be sent to Third Company. This unit, apparently within a regular infantry battalion, is led by a notoriously despotic commander named Zhilmurdaev (110). The sergeant's transfer may constitute a commander's unofficial means of dispensing with unruly men without

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[27]United States, Department of State, Afghanistan: Eight Years of Soviet Occupation, Special Report 173 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1987) 3.
[28]Incidentally, Orshev's itinerary ('Orshev needed to fly to Moscow and then further west') (164) reflects the autobiographical detail that Ermakov resides in Smolensk.

having his record sullied by documented reliance on penal battalions, suggesting a failure to discipline one's own troops.[29] And concerning combat preparedness, Ermakov refers to initial combat training conducted by non-commissioned officers at a specialized mountain training camp in Turkmenistan, which was for recent draftees only ('Beast' 16), ('Feast' 121). Combat training in Afghanistan, however, seems limited to an obstacle course for vehicle drivers ('Beast' 49).[30]

Not all of Ermakov's documentation reveals an oppressive environment. It also reveals civilizing influences as well, and is sometimes used simply as an aesthetic device which assists in the creation of a fictional world. For example, dedovshchina is presented as a judicial system with certain checks and balances. Thus in 'Safe Return', Orshev's former subordinates decide not to join in the fight against him because of his past record of relative mercy toward them (158), demonstrating a safeguard which counterbalances the demand for revenge. Another case of unexpected deviation from the norm involves dress. Ermakov's regimental camp has over three thousand inhabitants, all outfitted in earth-coloured cotton jackets and trousers ('Beast' 10). But by having the regimental commander in another story call his men 'ballerinas' for the alterations they have made to their clothing ('Feast' 110), Ermakov reveals that uniforms of the Soviet Army in Afghanistan were hardly identical. The reconnaissance troops are also shown to break with convention by wearing trainers instead of boots while on combat patrol in the mountains ('Yellow Mountain' 115), and Ermakov refers to braces as a popular gift among the soldiers ('Yellow Mountain' 108).[31] Other documentation reveals attributes of civilization amidst the hardships of war. The

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[29]Concerning an inspector's evaluation given to a unit commander, Viktor Suvorov (a pseudonym) notes that 'when the state of discipline in a unit is being assessed, the number of punishments is taken into account.' Suvorov 255.

[30]This corresponds to other evidence which suggests that little on-the-job combat proficiency training was conducted. See McMichael 119.

[31]Individual tailoring for a tighter fit is merely one of many such popular customs; army boot soles may also be trimmed for a smarter appearance. Schofield 92-93. Other modifications have doubtless existed as long as uniforms have been worn. More than a century ago, Lermontov's Pechorin noted the fashionable ruff over the collar among the military elite: 'Oni franty...voennye vypuskayut iz-za vorotnika bryzzhi.' M. Yu. Lermontov, 'Princess Mary', in Geroi nashego vremeni (Petrozavodsk: Gosizdat Karel'skoi ASSR, 1961) 70. More recently, according to one Soviet student, the white collar liners sewn into every Russian soldier's collar make a similar fashion statement today if sewn in slightly higher than usual, so that the edge appears over the top.

regimental post is indeed a city in miniature, with its own electricity generating station, a central square, gaols, restaurants in the form of dining halls and kitchens, bakeries, a club for lectures and films, and most importantly, bathhouses. Some of these banyas -- especially for the command echelon -- were quite elaborate, constructed of marble, panelled with wood, complete with dressing rooms, steam rooms and shelves for sitting, and furnished with rushes of aromatic cedar (37).[32]

In similar fashion, Ermakov combines documentation of enemy strongholds and supply routes with a romantic description of salient geographic characteristics in his brief overview of the various theatres of operation. For example, Kandahar is known not only as the base of Gailani's National Islamic Front, but also as the 'most bullet-ridden town in Afghanistan', and home to fabled pomegranate trees with fruit 'as large as a child's head' (49). Ermakov supplies the height in metres of various mountains before likening the Hindu Kush range to 'fortresses raised by Allah' (50). The author also notes the variegated political landscape within the Afghan historical tradition of warring tribes. He calls Masud's Panjsher Valley a 'state within a state', and refers to mujahedin 'hosts' lying in wait within their 'green zones' for their Soviet 'guests' (50).[33] The section concludes with a reference to Alexander the Great, the most famous of warriors who came to conquer the land, wherein Ermakov mentions the legendary Macedonian origin of the Nuristani people (51).

The weather forms part of this landscape, and Ermakov evokes not only the infamous heat of the Afghan sun, called a 'yellow Medusa' (9), but the equally daunting snowstorms which threaten to engulf a Soviet column (111-13). The author documents a swarm of locusts (134), and in several instances includes descriptions of the Afghan sand storms. One such account incorporates a certain romanticism; framed

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[32]So popular were the banyas, in fact, that their construction became subject to corruption. One colonel procurator revealed that in the mid-1980s the legal investigative branch was ordered to crack down on illegal bathhouses in Afghanistan. See Borovik, Afganistan 184. One of Prokhanov's characters also notes the priority given to the immediate installation of a general's portable banya as he moves about the countryside. See 'Babushkina gora', in Tretii tost 375.

[33]Masud was appointed Defence Minister in the first post-Najibullah Afghan coalition government, over the objections of Hekmatyar, a rival mujahedin leader. The latter is mentioned as controlling the area of the Urganskoe Gorge, and the southern region of Afghanistan where several of Ermakov's stories take place (49).

by white-topped mountains, the storm 'out of the East' shrouds a gigantic TU-135 jet liner in its 'yellow pall' ('Feast' 113). Thus the storm's massive size and strength, covering the city of Kabul in a fierce maelstrom of dust in which the soldiers are lost for an hour, labels the locale of the story as exotic. One of Ermakov's strengths is his evocation of the Afghan landscape, to which he devotes great attention in the novel:

> Along either side of the road lay the desert steppe, washed at the edge with a watercolour-blue corona. Over the eastern horizon the sun appeared suspended, drifted higher, grew smaller, pale, then white-hot...In the desert opposite the column stood tents made of animal skins, around which stood children, half-naked, dark-haired. At a distance, the sheep and camels grazed. The children stared at the soldiers; occasionally a woman, too, would step out from one of the tents and peer at the tanks and armoured personnel carriers. These were Pushtuns, nomads. (59)

Ermakov attempts to bring the Afghan landscape to the contemporary Russian reader much as Tolstoy brought the exotic Caucasus to his nineteenth-century audience.

In another seeming deviation from expectation, Ermakov seems to treat Soviet ethnic minorities in a relatively unmarked fashion. In 'Baptism', Sergeant Mamedov interacts with the Russian Shvarev as a normal contemporary of equal rank (96). He bullies Oparin, the younger Russian (97), in the same spirit (though without physical violence) as a Russian senior soldier punishes the Georgian Besikoshvili ('Beast' 27). Conflict between minorites is also depicted, such as a riot between Central Asian and Caucasian nationalities ('Beast' 56). Ermakov's depiction of interethnic violence seems not to distinguish between identifiable oppressor and oppressed, instead portraying the violence as a function of unofficial rank. Besides, the author portrays bilingual Central Asians as possessing a valued skill in a hostile environment. In 'Baptism', Akhat Kuchechkarov, a Tajik, acts as liaison with the Afghan forces, and greets an acquaintance in the Sarandoy militia with the traditional three kisses to show their friendship and presumably close working relationship (98).

The above discussions treat Ermakov's documentation both as social criticism and aesthetic enhancement. Additionally, this feature may be removed from a narrative context to form a brief study on the devolution of censorship in the context of Afghan War literature. As an initial revelation, 'Yellow Mountain' gives direct insight into the bureaucratic restrictions facing the editorial office of a typical Soviet newspaper in the

mid-1980s. Specifically, the story reveals an editor's options in circumventing official channels when dealing with the Chief Administration for Protection of State Secrets in the Press (Glavlit).[34] Egor Petrovich (redaktor, shef) who is the youth newspaper's 'responsible editor', mediates for his employees in conflicts with Glavlit, and Ermakov documents how Egor Petrovich chooses which decisions to fight and which battles he considers unwinnable.[35] The authorities he must contend with are, at the first level, the local Glavlit censors at the editorial offices. Above the local censors comes Demyan Vasilivich Zavsepech ('zaveduyushchii sektorom pechati, pod ego kontrolem pressa vsei oblasti'). As a member of the district Party committee, Zavsepech is accurately portrayed as a bureaucrat concerned primarily with ideological rather than literary matters, responsible to the Department of Propaganda of the USSR Central Committee Secretariat.[36] Powerful though he is in bringing pressure to bear on Fedya about making a speech on Army and Navy Day -- he threatens to fire the young writer if he refuses -- Zavsepech must nevertheless exercise authority through the responsible editor. Without Egor Petrovich's cooperation, as it turns out, Zavsepech cannot compel Fedya's compliance. The highest authority portrayed in the story is the regional Glavlit censor (Glavnyi Tsenzor Obllita) who in the flashback resolves the argument between Egor Petrovich and the local censor concerning the reference to Bulgakov. This regional director contacts Egor Petrovich by telephone, presumably from the regional centre office (as a hypothetical example, in Smolensk) after being told by his Glavlit subordinate at the local newspaper about the potential crisis. Thus when Ermakov ironically labels the regional director a 'Solomon' for his solution (putting references to each writer in different sentences) to what is in essence an absurd ruling,

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[34]For more information on unofficial channels of power within the censorship bureaucracy, see G. S. Smith, 'Literature and the Arts', The Soviet Union, ed. Robert William Davies, 2nd. ed. (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989) 161.

[35]The Glavlit decision he fights concerns the censor's refusal to keep a reference to the Soviet author Mikhail Bulgakov in the same sentence as a reference to a contemporary unnamed Soviet hack; such proximity, it is implied, would defame the reputation of the latter. The Glavlit decision which Egor Petrovich anticipates and therefore decides not to test is the censor's probable refusal to allow Fedya's controversial 'Afghan' story to be printed.

[36]After 1988, the Department of Propaganda was relabelled the Commission for Ideology. For further information on Communist Party interaction with the bureaucracy of the publishing industry, see Gregory Walker, Soviet Book Publishing Policy (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1978) 18-27.

he is attacking a formerly august and quite formidable bureaucrat.[37] These snapshots of bureaucratic tussling are an interesting update to the infighting portrayed in other instances, such as Solzhenitsyn's famous account of his experiences with Tvardovsky at Novyi mir.[38]

Against this general background, the effect of restrictions placed on Afghan War literature may be traced through a brief analysis of two motifs in Ermakov's works: drug abuse among troops in Afghanistan, which was a forbidden topic in the press through at least May 1988,[39] and descriptions of military equipment and battlefield tactics. Concerning the first motif, part of the evidence for censorship of Ermakov's works is contained in the text of his first publication in December 1987 of 'Simply Autumn', which would have been subject to the ban on references to drugs. During sentry duty, Vorzhakov, the central character, notes, 'I was alone, and I felt fine, only I really wanted to smoke' ('tol'ko vot kurit' sil'no khotelos'') (57). Similar phraseology is employed in the novel 'Sign of the Beast', but with regard to anasha instead of tobacco: 'But I wanted to smoke. Badly' ('A kurit' khotelos'. Ochen'') (54). This parallel is also present in 'Feast on the Banks of the Violet River', wherein Spivakov makes reference to 'mad laughter' (rzhachki) in the context of wine-drinking (121). This same word is used by the troops in 'Sign of the Beast' to connote the state of euphoria induced by anasha (55). Thus, Ermakov could have been using neo-Aesopeian references to the drug in his first stories when such mention risked the censor's rejection. The other probable confirmation of censorship concerning Ermakov's works is the aforementioned plot of 'Yellow Mountain', wherein a writer's memoirs are turned down for publication on the grounds that they will not survive the censor's deletions. If the story, which contains strong autobiographical tendencies, takes place in the mid-1980s after Ermakov's actual demobilization, then the single

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[37]The various ranks mentioned in this passage, along with their relationships, are also described in John and Carol Garrard, Inside the Soviet Writers' Union (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990) 175.

[38]Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn, The Oak and the Calf (London: Collins and Harvill, 1980).

[39]See Alexiev 49-51. This May 1988 article states that 'the Soviet media have not yet acknowledged the existence of drug abuse among Soviet troops in Afghanistan' (51).

reference to anasha in the memoirs supposedly submitted at that time would be sufficient cause for rejection. The actual reference in 'Yellow Mountain' is prima facie evidence of removal of the ban by the time of its publication in March 1989, and is perhaps the first such reference in fiction, albeit of wrongly suspected use rather than actual contravention of military regulations. Describing duty at a guard house removed from the main camp area, the protagonist tells how a suspicious commanding officer checked up on his troops. 'He would drop by at odd times to see if we were getting drunk on home-made beer (braga) or smoking anasha' (108). In any case, that reference in Znamya was followed in August 1989 by Ermakov's 'Safe Return' in Novyi mir, which contained references to actual use. The fact that 'Feast' appeared in print after 'Yellow Mountain' and 'Safe Return' may suggest that perhaps the former story was censored earlier, or that the editor was apprehensive over a reference (in 'Feast') which portrayed drug use within the borders of the Soviet Union.

Another possible insight into the evolution of censorship guidelines is afforded by a brief examination of references to military hardware and combat tactics. The story 'Feast', published in October 1989, contains the sentence, 'The Mi-6s, huge and heavy helicopters, did not land at the regimental camp -- they require a suitable area in which to set down, which, though under construction, had not been carried through to completion...' (111). The innocuous information itself is of no military significance, but the structure of the observation (naming a specific weapon system, describing it, and then referring to limitations on combat performance) is certainly presented in a way which might attract the attention of a censor.[40] The fact that this format for military-related data was approved for a work of fiction may reveal that the author and editor at Znamya were testing the political climate during the later stages of glasnost. The original justification of Soviet censorship was the protection of state secrets, so the appearance of such an item might mean that the classified list of military proscriptions

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[40]The Mi-6 (Hook) helicopter is a heavy-lift craft, and with a normal weight of approximately 40,000kg, or about four times that of the Mi-24 (Hind) attack helicopter, is one of the largest helicopters in the Soviet inventory. See David C. Isby, Weapons and Tactics of the Soviet Army (London: Jane's, 1981) 319, 322.

was undergoing revision along with the more spectacular changes to former political proscriptions. Indeed, Ermakov's subsequent 1992 references are much more frank. For example, in documenting a combined arms attack at dawn on a mujahedin mountain stronghold, his description of the chain of command employed to request fire support is related in documentary style ('Beast' 63-64), as is the detail that the terribly destructive Grad rocket launchers accommodate forty rockets per launcher ('Beast' 69).[41] These background details lend authenticity to the setting, in which the protagonist is assigned to an artillery battery.

Just as Aleksandr Prokhanov's works may be seen to trace the breakdown of consensus on an official interpretation of the war, so the stories of Oleg Ermakov document the formation of new interpretations. Both writers display their love of Russia, yet Ermakov replaces communal and materialist ideology with spirituality in various forms. To a degree greater than any other writer, Ermakov grants to individual perception a narrative equality with objective documentation, and signifies this equality with stylistic experimentation. Consistent with this preference for lyric impression is a de-emphasizing of plot. The disintegration of political controls over Russian literature may also be charted in his works; just as an increasing freedom of the press seems to have compelled Prokhanov to adopt new strategies, this same freedom has allowed Ermakov the opportunity to document with greater verisimilitude the experience of the Soviet soldier in Afghanistan. Thus, Ermakov may be compared with other individual voices which have described past Russian wars, and indeed, writers from other nations who have portrayed similar conflicts. His recurring theme of persecution contains an implicit mandate for social change, but his narrative priority remains, to this point, the lyrical evocation of an individual's spiritual and moral transformation through the experience of war.

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[41]The Grad multiple rocket launcher is similar to the 122mm BM-21, which also mounts forty rockets. See Isby, Russia's War 10.

Conclusion

Russian literature emerging from the Soviet-Afghan War invites special attention not only for the intrinsic merits it may possess, but also by virtue of its portrayal of a war which coincided with the dissolution of the Russian empire. The southward expansion of this empire toward Afghanistan, which began with a Russian emissary's visit to Herat in 1464, culminated in the invasion of the Soviet 40th Army in 1979. But the army was destined to retreat within a decade. Because of this historical coincidence, Russian writers have had, and will continue to have, the opportunity to explore much larger themes in Afghan War literature than might normally be the case with a limited conflict. Indeed, in terms of Soviet losses, the war was relatively small; on average, more Soviets lost their lives during any single twenty-four hour period of the Great Patriotic War than were lost during the entire Afghan conflict. Yet the historical circumstances of World War Two produced a triumphant literature which in the eyes of many western critics, at least, is predictably conventional in style and content. Conversely, the literature from the Afghan War, as I have attempted to demonstrate, exhibits the potential to achieve a new level of openness in political and stylistic expression which, only a few years ago, was considered unimaginable.

Formerly, the primary obstacle to this openness was the political and ideological control imposed on literature by successive Soviet regimes. Intellectual conformity was the rule for the vast majority of Soviet writers who dealt with the topic of war, who in any case viewed with pride their nation's role in defeating the Nazi army in World War Two. This conformity became even more entrenched during the final years of Brezhnev's regime, and continued to be enforced during most of the 1980s. Nevertheless, three periods may be discerned in the evolution of Afghan War literature. The first period, which lasted for the first four years of the war, was characterized by almost unbroken silence among writers. Governmental directives forbade any mention of Soviet participation in sustained, offensive combat; thus, literature of the Afghan War was placed categorically out of bounds. Aleksandr Prokhanov, Kim Selikhov,

and Aleksandr Stovba might publish journalistic dispatches, novels, and poems about the war, but these few examples were politically doctrinaire.

This strict ideological regime was enforced throughout the second period as well; the only characteristics distinguishing this era, 1983-1986, from the previous one are the volume of material published, and the documentation of Soviet participation in combat. Publicistic articles on war heroes appeared, and Aleksandr Prokhanov -- the one writer who enthusiastically endorsed the invasion from the beginning -- published several additional fictional works in the same mould. By 1987, however, President Gorbachev's policy of glasnost turned into a phenomenon far more radical than merely an extreme form of traditional Soviet self-criticism. Artem Borovik's reportage of that year ushered in the third period of war coverage by subtly changing the focus of reader attention from governmental policy to an individual journalist's impressions. Even though, in retrospect, these subjective impressions seem relatively conformist, this reorientation served to cast the war in an entirely different light. The role of Soviet forces was now subject to individual scrutiny, it seemed, and this decentralization of authority characterizes the third stage in the evolution of the war's portrayal. Svetlana Aleksievich's compilation of first-person accounts of Afghan veterans serves as another representative publicistic work of this era. Other journalists exposed corruption, drug abuse, violations of the Geneva Convention, and tactical defeat in battle -- subjects which long were suppressed in Soviet literature. Aleksievich went one step further in revealing the emotions and attitudes of the veterans, and also gave voice to women who had participated in the war, as well as to the relatives of those who lost their lives.

The military authorities and their representatives in the sphere of production writing did not go willingly into this new era of freedom of expression. They counterattacked with criticism of the media, and excoriated the new generation of writers whom they accused of subverting the Soviet army's traditionally unassailable role in official Russian fiction. Other writers and journalists who previously had maintained the party line, however, were allowed to express personal opinions. Professional military writers such as Viktor Verstakov now raised their voices to

protest against the controls on literature which had previously suppressed the soldiers' own expression. Petr Tkachenko set about compiling for the first time the songs and poems of the war which had been written by veterans.

Indeed, magnitizdat copies of tape recorded songs written and sung by soldiers were among the first items to be suppressed during the war. These recordings were confiscated by the military authorities on the grounds that listening to them exerted a demoralizing effect. Gradually, the Soviet leadership granted grudging acknowledgement to the truth and raw emotion found in these songs. Voenizdat published songbooks, while Melodiya recorded veterans' concerts. These 'Afghan' compositions found their origins in at least three types of songs: official 'mass songs'; soldiers' amateur songs of World War Two; and the underground authors' songs, or guitar poetry, of the 1960s dissidents. Thus, many 'Afghan' songs have themes in common with earlier soldiers' compositions, such as: inspirational hymns; epic songs celebrating a hero; lyrical songs expressing fear, love, and homesickness; and satiric songs. But the differences between the Afghan War songs and their predecessors also become apparent upon closer examination of this genre. The inspirational hymns put much less emphasis on campaigns, due to the inconclusive nature of Soviet strategic action in Afghanistan. Likewise, few epic songs attempt to immortalize the deeds of heroes; and satiric songs are aimed at the Soviets themselves instead of the enemy, as was the case in World War Two. Moreover, the texts of song and poetry taken as a whole contain significant anti-war sentiments -- by no means the predominant theme within the 'Afghan' genre -- but clearly present nonetheless. In this regard, lyric poets such as Aleksandr Karpenko give voice to expressions which would earlier in the decade have been considered as subversive as dissident Russian emigre poetry.

This evolutionary process holds true for fiction as well, even in the case of prose works published by and for the military. What began as an exercise in duplicating the propaganda concerning Red Army exploits during the Great Patriotic War, gave way after 1987 to a new type of literature. Thus, production tales of selfless heroes and subhuman adversaries -- or, in the case of emigre literature, the mirror

image -- were replaced by stories which emphasized the psychological and moral effect of this war on the Soviet soldiers who fought in it. Nikolai Ivanov incorporated criticism of the Communist Party into his otherwise orthodox stories, while other authors, such as Sergei Dyshev, have portrayed in authentic tones the bitterness of Soviet soldiers attempting to fight a war with little political support from the homeland, and at times poor logistical support from the military establishment as well. Aleksandr Segen' takes this process a step further with his ideologically conservative, yet stylistically experimental story of combat, 'The BTR That Lost Its Way'. He also was one of the first authors to explore the theme of the battle-hardened, disabled war veteran returning to a moribund society. Eduard Pustynin adds satire to the types of stories now being published about the conflict. Thus, with the start of the new decade, Afghan War literature exhibits self-deprecating humour, as well as serious introspection; liberal criticism to match conservative justification of the war; and fantasy to complement realist modes of expression. The heroic Soviet military collective is replaced in literature with a modern platoon in which men argue, make mistakes under pressure, and occasionally kill one another along with the enemy.

In many ways the evolution of Afghan literature through the decade is represented by the contrast between the works of official representative Aleksandr Prokhanov and those of the young war veteran Oleg Ermakov. Prokhanov's self-styled 'political novels' of the early 1980s were statements of support for the policy of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, couched in socialist realist fiction. They portray narrative heroes, often projections of the author's ego, who overcome personal problems by experiencing the selfless camaraderie of a war zone. These romantic depictions of revolution and devotion to military victory adopt an increasingly pessimistic tone after 1987. Now Prokhanov portrays negative heroes and military disasters, and he implicitly criticizes the Communist Party for having abused the trust of the people. He seeks refuge in mysticism, religion, and Russian nationalism, three elements which become more pronounced in his later war fiction.

If, to borrow a phrase from Robert Graves, Prokhanov was the original 'gleeman' of the Soviet regime, singing its praises like a medieval court bard, then the young writer Oleg Ermakov might be cast in the role of 'poet', an independent spirit who writes according to his own conventions. Even Ermakov's first short stories have a rebellious tone to them; he speaks of the resentment of the returning veteran, and uses satiric characterization to attack the Party and the military leadership. He aims his barbs at targets such as literary censorship, and harassment in the army ranks. Primarily, however, he uses these themes to depict the effect of the war on the psyche. His protagonists are prototypically young, intellectually-oriented soldiers who cross a moral boundary by participating in combat. The author conveys this psychological process through the motif of dreams, and stylistically by means of stream of consciousness and other forms of non-standard syntax.

Ermakov's anti-war novel 'The Sign of the Beast', appearing in the press several short months after the fall of the Najibullah regime in Kabul, provides a capstone to this first decade of the war's depiction. With this novel, Ermakov graphically portrays the violence of the war, as well as the stark beauty of the Afghan landscape. But he also incorporates historical detail into his text, portraying the Soviet invasion as a modern-day equivalent to previous 'imperialist' and religiously-motivated conquests of Afghanistan in past centuries. The emigre scholar Mikhail Geller has described Prokhanov as a writer of 'colonial novels'; perhaps Ermakov may be termed an 'anti-colonial' novelist. As Prokhanov celebrated Russia's role as ideological liberator and technological superpower, Ermakov's characters wish for nothing more than to return home, to retreat to the forests of Russia, and to experience other cultures through the lens of literature and philosophy rather than by force of arms. Ermakov's novel conveys despair over the Russian role in late twentieth-century ideological conflicts, and thus provides a link with other literatures, such as the Russian dissident literature of World War Two as exemplified by Bulat Okudzhava's novella Good Luck, Schoolboy!, or American stories about the Vietnam War, such as Tim O'Brien's short story 'The Things They Carried', which express similar sentiments. The theme of

Ermakov's novel may also be compared to the disillusionment expressed in nineteenth-century literature by Lev Tolstoy in Sevastopol Stories.

Just as Joseph Brodsky's Afghan poem of 1980 predicted an 'ice-age of slavery', Ermakov's fiction does not provide solutions to Russia's current turmoil. Thus Ermakov's works, and those of many of his compatriots, still may belong to the contemporary movement in Russian letters which Galina Belaya has termed the 'literature of decay'. So soon after the Soviet defeat in Afghanistan, however, Russia's writers have accomplished a remarkable feat in depicting that war from a multitude of individual viewpoints. In a personal interview, Aleksandr Prokhanov aptly characterized this achievement as the conflation of several decades of World War Two literature into a few short years in the case of Afghan War literature. Perhaps the following decade will make more clear what answers, if any, the generation of 'Afghan' writers will provide for Russia's post-war dilemmas, and for the reinterpretation of the nation's past.

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