

M. GORKI'S AND I. BUNIN'S VIEW OF THE RUSSIAN INTELLECTUAL  
IN THE LIFE OF KLIM SAMGIN AND THE LIFE OF ARSENEV

by

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## ABSTRACT

In my thesis I will discuss two main literary works which reveal the development of the Russian intellectual: "The Life of Klim Samgin," by M. Gorki, and "The Life of Arsenev," by I. Bunin. My aim is to provide an analysis of the main characters in each work, and to criticize the artistic devices used by the authors. I will briefly mention several other well known Russian authors who were writing at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, in order to place the main works under discussion in their historical context.

In chapter one, some aspects of the development of the Russian intelligentsia in literature will be discussed, by presenting a brief survey of topically selected works of A. Chekhov, V. Korolenko, and V. Veresaev. The second chapter will be devoted to the analysis of "The Life of Klim Samgin." The third chapter will present a detailed analysis of "The Life of Arsenev." The fourth chapter will offer a comparative study of the artistic devices utilized in the two works.

In conclusion, I will show the literary fate of both works. In one case it led to the proclamation of Gorki as the "Father of Socialist Realism," in the other it established the artistic value of Bunin in world literature.

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## CHAPTER I

Gorki has been proclaimed by Soviet critics as the "Father of Soviet Literature," but in reality he belongs to the period before the Revolution. In 1917 he clearly stated his opposition to the baseness and crudeness of the movement, and accused the leaders of succumbing to the corrupting influences of power. Gorki left Russia in 1921, ostensibly because of tuberculosis, but returned permanently, amidst great fanfare, in 1929. His novel "The Life of Klim Samgin," on which he was still working, was already being published. It was an attempt to chronicle the development of Russian society, especially the intelligentsia, from the 1870's to 1917. It is in fact a tiresome endless biography of a contrived personage, and an attempt by Gorki to align his revolutionary sympathies with the hostile ideology of the party demagogues.

Ivan Bunin left Russia soon after the Revolution, and made no contributions to Soviet literature. His "Life of Arsenev," is partly autobiographical, and is a chronicle of a disappearing type of Russian life. The hero Arsenev, is the representative of a beautiful, to Bunin, epoch in Russian life which was passing into oblivion. I intend to show the way in which two authors from different levels of society, through biographical

accounts of the lives of two intellectuals, their protagonists, presented their country and its members. They of course were not the only ones who were concerned with the problem of intellectuals and revolution, and I will present a brief sampling of several others who were dealing with the same problem, as well as the reactions of various contemporary critics. Such an approach I hope would show the importance of the intellectual segment in Russian society, by showing how many eminent authors were dealing, not always objectively, with that topic.

One of the first writers in Russian Literature of the 1880's to offer an objective presentation of the "intellectual" was Anton Chekhov in the play "Ivanov." From this point forward one can witness the inalienable tie between the historical and literary progression of the intelligentsia as a class. Chekhov stated that in his play he wanted to present a characteristic contemporary type. The main character in the play, Ivanov, is a landowner whose estate, even though large, is in ruin. He has married a Jewess, because it was fashionable, and in expectation of an inheritance. He falls in love with a fine young girl, but realizes that he is no longer

the man he was in his youth, that he is played out. His ideas on the futility of life, and his inability to play a constructive role in it, lead to his suicide. This play is valuable because it foreshadows future literary direction, and because in it Chekhov did not pass moral judgements, but even tried to present Ivanov in a favourable light, and was adamant in asserting that all he wanted to do was to present people as he saw them.

Ovsyaniko-Kulikovski, in his dissertation on the play, exposes the inability of the Russian educated man of the 1880's to engage in a prolonged pursuit of any project. He makes the point that Ivanov with his ideas of reforming and improving his estate took too heavy a load upon himself without any rational planning. Kulikovski explains that Ivanov is not an exclusive character because Ivanov's ailment is typical to men in all walks of life, not just to a certain part of society which can be isolated into a definite group. The 80's produced people who were emotionally and mentally unstable, and Ivanov is one of their representatives. Kulikovski maintains that Ivanov is simply a neurasthenic. Ivanov-Razumnik on the other hand, does see Ivanov as an exclusive representative, he sees him as a man who has strayed into the quicksand



of bourgeois philosophy, and has become submerged in it. I would conclude that both men are partly correct. Ivanov is suffering from nervous upsets, but he is also the exclusive representative of the educated elite, far removed from reality, slow moving and thinking, preoccupied with small things, which almost inadvertantly determined the course which Russia was to follow.

From Chekhov, as the paterfamilias of the new movement in Russian literature offering descriptions of the intelligentsia of the 80's, it is necessary to stop and examine the work of a very respected and senior author of the time, V. G. Korolenko. He is aptly appraised by a distinguished Russian critic, J. Eichenwald, who wrote the following:

Korolenko is dear to the Russian intelligentsia because in his works a responding heart is revealed which no injury, no injustice can escape. The very essence of his nature is to be a defender, an aid. Wherever assistance is necessary and possible, he can never remain indifferent. Many a time has he raised his soft, yet firm voice in defense of the injured. The arrow of social conscience always tends in the direction indicated by Korolenko, and if you follow him you are sure to follow the truth. 1

These traits are visible in his monumental autobiography, "The History of My Contemporary," which he began writing when he was fifty-five. Various opinions exist about this work, which was Korolenko's culminative effort.

Korolenko himself is viewed either as a classic, or as a man of narrow talent who early exhausted his creative ability. His writing is charming and simple, and one implicitly trusts the author because of his irreproachable idealism toward, and hope for the intelligentsia, to which he clings enduringly. This is probably the feature which caused his popularity to soar in Russia. People needed to grasp at something which would dispel their moribund thoughts and renew in them a trust in humanity. In "The History of My Contemporary," Korolenko resists his previous profusely emotional and lyrical style, and produces a work which if not thrilling, is definitely readable. It is interesting as a portrait gallery of unusual people, as a picture of country life, of his father, his school, and as a detailed picture of the conditions prevalent in Russia, which eventually caused the Romanov Empire to abdicate and collapse. Korolenko understood that the intelligentsia and the common people were on divergent paths, and that the only thing which could lead to the salvation of the country was a striving toward a fusion and blending of differences through mass education. Korolenko hoped that the intellectual would try to understand the ordinary man, an outlook which made him a favourite

of the Soviets, but in 1917, and until his death, he remained opposed to them.

In literary criticism, Korolenko has fared quite well, but there is one man, Tkhorzhevski, who is extremely harsh in his appraisal. He dismisses the "Blind Musician," which has been hailed as a masterpiece both in Russia and the West, for its "childishness," and "The History of My Contemporary," he calls "an idealization of revolutionaries and Revolution, but its historical interest is narrow and small." It is necessary to stamp "for children only,"<sup>2</sup> on all Korolenko's works, and while there is some truth in this criticism, Tkhorzhevski is on the other side of the spectrum from Soviet adulatory criticism, and a point somewhere between the two gives a true picture. Today, Korolenko's honesty, kindness, aid to the defenseless, and encouragement of many self-taught writers, the most important of whom was Gorki, are mentioned more vociferously than his literary outpourings.

Veresaev, who is another chronicler of the intelligentsia, owes his success to his precise and sensitive appraisal of events contemporary to him. One of the most important ideological problems which he presented, was the confrontation between the Populists and the Marxists in their ideas

that the future development of Russia rested on the peasants in the first case, and the industrial labourers in the second. This pressing question often permeated Veresaev's writing. As to his own political inclination, I present an often cited quotation, but one which is not conclusive, nor should be taken as a final assessment. In the 80's:

There was no faith in the people. There was only an enormous acknowledgement of a tremendous guilt before them, and shame for one's privileged position. However, no way out could be seen.

In the 90's:

New people have come, brave and credent. A tremendous, stable force could be felt stepping out assuredly into the arena of Russian history.... I joined a Marxian literary circle.)\*

Since most of the intellectuals were incapable of, or did not want any action, it is not surprising that Veresaev saw hope in the young, vigorous, bold Marxists, and joined their circle. After the Revolution, Veresaev remained in Russia, and was rewarded for his earlier sentiments, but he had quite obviously cooled toward the Revolution, and all it had produced, and concentrated only on historical literary research.

Veresaev's intelligentsia, as delineated in his works, is progressive, socially conscious, and striving towards more proximity to the people. Because he was

an innate part of the educated society, we are able to see its workings from inside. Even though Veresaev tries to present his pieces objectively, we cannot but experience his feeling of partisanship for his heroes who are abandoning the revolutionary camp. The directions upon which the intelligentsia embarked come into view in a cycle of works: "Bez Dorogi," (Without a Way 1894); "Povetrie," (Pestilence 1897); "Na Povorote," (At the Turning Point 1901); "K Zhizni," (Toward Life 1908); and "V Tupike," (In Deadlock 1922). The first works of this cycle manifest the wavering and doubt which pervades the young radical intelligentsia toward the revolutionary movement, and causes them to depart from it in favour of an individualistic and philistine life. The next, shortly after the 1905 movement, inspects an even sharper decline away from the revolution, helped by the forces of reaction which were prevalent. There is disappointment in the proletariat and in socialism. Youth is drawn towards enjoyment of life, Nietzsche, and religion. The last novel reviews the intelligentsia which has refused to be taken in by the October Revolution, cannot accept it, and now finds that it is in deadlock, physically, mentally and ideologically.

There were of course many other authors who were

writing about, or simply belonged within the realm of the intelligentsia. Some of them remained in Russia after the Revolution, as did Veresaev, but there were also many who fled abroad. To deal with them in any detail would require a book in itself, for each varied from the three I have mentioned in style and content. Leonid Andreev in his early writings, before his submission to the fantastic, sombre and horrendous, was very definitely part of the realm, and an important figure in it. P. D. Boborykin, almost forgotten today, is discussed in several chapters of Kulikovski's "History of the Russian Intelligentsia". V. V. Rozanov, cynic and nihilist, a truly remarkable character obsessed with Dostoevsky, sex, and Christianity; Remizov with his expressionism, and predilection for the surrealist use of words; the school of realists including such big name emigres as B. Zaitsev, N. Teffi, Z. Gippius, the important literary figure D. S. Merezhkovski, writer poet, philosopher, religious thinker, and journalist, known mainly for his historical novels, must be mentioned. Such names as F. Sologub, I. S. Shmelev, A. Kuprin should not be omitted, as they are well known writers on the border of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The list can be extended to great lengths, but I will now begin

to deal with the most important Soviet and emigre writer, if not by the quality of his work, at least by his effect on literature through personality, political inclination, and behaviour. Maxim Gorki (1868-1936) succeeded with the public with his first appearance on the stage of literature. At first as a stringent defender of individualism, and spokesman for the "bosyaki" (bums, hoboes), then as "stormy petrel" of the Revolution, the representative of the conscious proletariat, and finally in his last period as the propagandist of socialist teachings.

I will begin by briefly outlining those works which preceded "The Life of Klim Samgin," and anticipated its theme. I will then deal with the structure of the novel, and with the development of the main protagonist, through whose eyes Russian society is revealed to us. Finally I will discuss the multitude of secondary characters, and the success or failure of Gorki's undertaking. I will then undertake the analysis of Bunin's "Life of Arsenev," generally under the same divisions as with Gorki's work. This will lead to a critical appraisal of those aspects of the works which I have brought forth, and a statement on their success or failure in the depiction of a Russian intellectual. Naturally, I must state before proceeding

further, that the two main works which I have chosen to analyze are of completely different genres. Gorki visualized his work as a vast, panoramic, epic, which would show the historical development of the Russian intelligentsia, but it was never finished because he became bogged down by dialectics. It is written in a brash, officially demanded style. Bunin clings to the calm, gracious, classical style. His aim in writing "The Life of Arsenev," perhaps not as explicit as Gorki's was to present a view of a departing age in Russia when the intellectual from the nobility was coming to a sad end. Bunin achieves his aim through a lyrical and poetic style. His work is often called autobiographical, but he himself rejected such nomenclature for it. The diversity of the two works, the different backgrounds of the authors, and thus their differing opinions, views, and methods of expression, is precisely what attracted me to them. Each author in his own way allows us a particular vision of Russia and its society.



## CHAPTER II

After the issue of his first book of short stories, Gorki immediately became popular, especially among the left-leaning youth and intelligentsia. When he returned permanently to Russia, he became an unofficial overseer of cultural development, and attempted to correlate the dispersed intellectuals into a group. Amongst these professors and academics, over whom he presided at meetings, it was impossible to tell that this man who could recite dates, names and facts with extraordinary accuracy, was a self-taught former vagrant. As Blok said of Gorki: "fate had set him as a mediator between the people and the intellectuals".<sup>1</sup> Thus it seemed auspicious for this man to write an account of the Russian intelligentsia. But unfortunately, the material which formed the basis of "The Life of Klim Samgin", proved too overwhelming for Gorki to encompass, and he himself admitted the following in a letter to Romain Rolland in the beginning of 1933:

Without in the least posing before you, I can say in complete sincerity, that this endless history of man's attempts to free himself from the coercions of reality, without changing it except through words-- this history, I have written ponderously in the extreme, tediously, and altogether--badly....<sup>2</sup>

Added to this was his declared aversion for the bourgeois philistine intellectual, which is evident in a series

of short stories and plays which preceded what was to be the culminative and definitive statement on the life of the intelligentsia--"The Life of Klim Samgin."

The first of these was "The Malapert" (1897), a short story which flagellates the hypocrisy of a liberal newspaperman. "Varenka-Olesova" (1898) describes a university lecturer who is full of bookish knowledge and bookish morality, but who is unable to control his passions. In "More about the Devil," an intellectual is ridiculed, because his soul is filled only with ambition, spite, and trepidation. In 1901 in the play "The Philistines," and from then on in several plays, the intelligentsia is cruelly indicted. One of the most severe plays is "The Vacationers" (1904), which unmasks the lives of several intellectual families. They appear as people preoccupied with small things, filled with ennui, and searching for a comfortable place where they could hide from life. Varvara Mikhailovna, one of the heroines in the play, utters a statement, which is the crux of the play, and graphically illustrates her and those around her.

We are vacationers in our own country....Some kind of alien people. We bustle about, trying to find comfortable places in life...we do nothing, and only talk at great repulsive lengths. We live on the earth, foreign to everything...we do not know how to be useful people in life. It seems to me that soon, tomorrow, some other strong, brave people will come, and sweep us from the earth like dirt.<sup>3</sup>

In 1905 Gorki produced another play, "Children of the Sun," which caps this cycle. It is about an educated man who is so fanatically attached to his studies that he is willing to make any sacrifices for them, and yet at the same time, he is completely useless when it comes to living an active, practical life. His wife, who is a young vigorous woman, is forced to curb her passions and act as a nurse for her helpless husband. These "children of the sun," locked in their world, discuss their interrelationships, dream about a beautiful future, engage in studious investigations, but do not lift a finger to help the population in the same provincial town which is sinking into degradation, through drinking without letup, wife beating, etc. The common people with reason regard the educated intellectuals, who should be their leaders and counselors, as their most hated enemies.

From the basis that these earlier works provided, Gorki embarked on the "odyssey" of Klim Samgin, in which he was going to reveal the decadance of the intellectual class in Imperial Russia, by creating a vast historical panorama of the major events from the 1880's to 1917, and showing the reaction of his characters to those historical events. The novel was actually written with

two main themes. One relates the history of an empty soul, the history of a man who lacks any spirituality, and whose emptiness leads to an inevitable end. The other recounts Russian social history for forty years before the October Revolution. This actually tends to become the main plan of the book, as it overshadows many of the characters, who are thin, two-dimensional representatives of various ideologies, stretched out over an immense historical tableau, including such events as the Khodynka, the industrial exposition of 1896, Bauman's funeral, the ninth of January, the Moscow barricades in the year 1905, the period of reaction following the first revolution, The Russo-Japanese war, the actions of the Black Hundred, Zubatovshchina, as well as several other lesser political incidents. The novel was to end with Lenin returning to Petersburg, and the events of the October Revolution. One also sees Moscow, Petersburg, Russia's villages and provincial doldrums, merchant towns, and even glimpses of Berlin, Paris, and Geneva. Worthy of note are the living conditions of various classes delineated in the book, the trenchant sketches of literary salons. Read separately, many excerpts from the four volume novel are interesting and informative, but there are too many characters who appear suddenly

and artificially, and too many banal situations for the reader to wade through, making any lengthy reading sessions tedious indeed.

Structurally, "The Life of Klim Samgin," is Gorki's most ambitious undertaking. It is divided into four parts or volumes, the last of which is unfinished. It is an attempt to chronicle and represent all the classes in Russia through the eyes of a typical member of the intelligentsia. Klim serves as the centre of the novel, and his preponderance (he appears on almost every page) creates the impression that Gorki is trying to push down our throats his own aversion to this class of society, and by so doing quell his own intellectual fires. The other characters are shown either through their reactions to historical events, or in the course of chronological development, but there are no major individual characters aside from Samgin, because Gorki was too intent on making them mouthpieces of various kinds of ideologies, so that together, through their hundreds of mouths they produce an incoherent babble.

The first volume shows the development of Samgin, his family, friends and acquaintances, as a study of a generation in the provinces of Russia. The second and third deal at

length with the events leading up to and occurring during 1905, and the Russo-Japanese war. These volumes are very often drawn out when Gorki launches into lengthy philosophical discussions, but they are interesting as documentary compilations of historical events. The third volume ends with Samgin as a lawyer in the provinces, and the fourth begins with him as a tourist abroad, mostly in Paris, and then finally shows his return to Petersburg where he observes the Revolution and becomes its victim.

Samgin is a complicated, intriguing character, he is not, as Gorki would have us believe, "typical", and ordinary, and to imagine him as a symbol for the liberal intelligentsia is very difficult indeed. Klim as an "outsider" is praiseworthy. Everything goes wrong for him. He cannot find happiness in life, marriage, culture, politics, sex, literature, and his inability to participate in these things initiates his moral disintegration. Gorki's allegation that the intelligentsia failed to play its role at the head of the Revolution because Klim is symbolic of its membership, is far fetched. Klim doubts the importance of life itself, and therefore, until he can find some meaning in it, he wants to exist comfortably. Since he cannot find a meaning, he stagnates and decomposes.

Klim is presented to us from the negative viewpoint. He is irritated by interesting people, whom he compares to painted indians, he is indifferent, aloof, his actions are fraudulent and self-deceptive, and his primary concern is for his own well-being. He is skeptical and non-constructive, especially about revolution and revolutionaries. But from youth, because of constant parental fussing, Samgin thought himself a special person, an "individual". Emulating the ideas promulgated by his family, he desires to assume his rightful place as a leader of the masses, yet he is not conscious of the complete separation which exists between his upper class family and the masses. He does not have original thoughts or words, and the meaninglessness of his life allows him to wallow in self-deception. Samgin is neither gifted nor talented, but because of his ability to unmask those he encounters, we are more favourably predisposed toward him than Gorki wanted us to be. One of the more interesting aspects of his life to examine, is his attitude toward, and relationship with women. Here Klim cannot be blamed fully, for it is Gorki's own inability to understand the essence of man and woman together that shows through. Klim's behaviour is atypical of an educated, cultured, intelligent man's.

His approach is vulgar, obtrusive, and blunt. Philosophically he regards women as a hindrance, palatable occasionally in the bedroom, but even then only for a short while. Gorki perhaps under the influence of Zola and the theories of environment and inheritance that affected that writer, similarly constructs Klim. From early youth, Klim observes in his own family a strange relationship between male and female. His mother is alternately clasped by Tomilin in an avowal of his love, or fondled by Varavka, during her husband's frequent absences. From such a beginning Klim develops his perverse attitudes toward women, which culminate with his adventurous and obscene approach to Dronov's wife. Only the imperious Marina Zotova withstands him. He actually fears her because he is at first unable to discover her "secret". His first experiment is the submissive Nekhaeva. He is insensitive and impassive, and uses her for his own gratification. She is ill with tuberculosis, under the influence of the French decadents, and thus adroitly suitable for the degenerate Klim, as a prelude to Lidia. He does feel some pity for Nekhaeva and her deep feelings for him give him pleasure, but he continues to use her until her caresses begin to bore him, and he then bluntly ends the affair. He was pleased



that his affair with her produced more respect for him in his acquaintances, and when he ended with her, he thought that he had gained in maturity. He recognized Nekhaeva as intelligent, but emotional intimacy frightened him and drew him away from her, for fear she would understand in him what he did not want her to understand. His affair with Lidia is carried out for his own satisfaction, to gratify his sensuous cravings. He is disappointed, at the end of the liaison, that he has not been able to make Lidia sob, or kiss his hands in gratitude for the happiness which he had bestowed on her. His next affair and marriage to Varvara begins with a desire to please and be tender to her because she was comfortable to be with, moderate, and obedient. She aroused feelings in him that Lidia had never been able to awaken. But again, Samgin's feelings of supremacy over Varvara are eventually shaken, and he dislikes not being in complete control. He begins to feel that she does not understand him, and their marriage collapses. He admits that his entanglement with Varvara was a mistake, and that he was made for the life of a bachelor. He finally finds a police agent, Nikonova, whose thoughts harmonize with his own. This woman demands nothing, does not talk about "high things", and after

several meetings with her, Samgin decides that she is a true friend, that she is like a "drawer in a desk"<sup>4</sup> that can serve as a repository for his feelings. With her, it was easy to talk about the most important topic to Samgin--himself. Her lack of regard for the "important defenders of humanity" matched his misanthropy, and her views seemed to him completely natural, simple, and normal, corresponding exactly to his own. Nikonova considered Samgin one of her own kind. His constant skepticism toward revolutions, made it easy for him to be with her. Nikonova is used by Gorki as an illustration of the "wrong" type of person that Samgin unwittingly picks as a friend, and thus reveals his true self, and his hatred for a workers' uprising. Another example of this type of "friend" is found in Mitrofanov, whom Samgin befriends as a healthy thinking, ordinary Russian person, when in reality he is an agent of the Okhrana. Mitrofanov to Samgin is an example of a "kind" person, as he performs several small favours for him without expecting any in return. The self-revelatory experience toward which these friendships were leading Samgin, occurs when Samgin himself is offered the role of spy for the gendarmerie. To his amazement he is not morally insulted by such an offer, and declines not because

of some long held, cherished belief, but because his borrowed words and thoughts have become an integral part of him, and these are the motivating force which cause him to reject the offer. There is one other basic trait revealed to us by Samgin's confrontation with women, which further delineates his unpleasant character. He is proud of the fact that he is unable to become emotionally attached for any length of time to any woman, something which he thinks is the mark of a strong, independent, and cultured man.

Samgin's outer appearance is graceless, matt, insipid, colourless. His features are not particularly expressive, nor does his whole physical appearance create or produce any memorable effect. His inner world is almost as bland as his outer appearance. He is not a doer, he is an observer. He is never directly involved in any human actions or relationships, but always appears to be on the periphery of events and society, observing and formulating from the sidelines. These are the traits that Gorki vehemently rejected and condemned. The desire to escape from the harshness of reality, to change life only by words, and not by actions, to live in society and yet be completely independent of it, this is what Gorki criticized as the illogical, irrational directions of the Samgins and the

mass of people they represent. Through the entire book Gorki tries to show the involuntary captivity and subjugation in which the philistine intellectuals found themselves in. This is reflected in Klim's life. He is constantly forced to act against his own deep secret desires. When he is on the verge of carrying them out, he is forced by some "event", to act in contradiction to his own will. The Revolution is completely foreign to him, yet he is involved in aiding it in some way, even to the point of risking his life for it. This affectation of expressing false sentiments brings on instability and duplicity. From the doubt and disillusion which permeate and saturate him, stems his skeptical and withdrawn way of life. In his youth he was told that the intelligentsia was the best part of society, that it sacrificed itself for the people, without any benefit for itself. As he became older, he was more unwilling to give anything of himself, and became firmly convinced that the intelligentsia was a chosen branch of society, but he did not think about the position that people like himself should take in life. As he becomes more mature, he also becomes convinced of the futility of life, and of the futility of any high ideals. As he was frequently told that he was not like the rest,

that he was an individual, he decided to go along with such an image of himself, and attempt to be different than he really was. Because of this, he does not have, nor will he express his own opinions. He prefers to acquire the jargon of the progressive revolutionaries, and then to circulate uncensored among them. When he was younger he would be offended and humiliated by this inadequacy, but in time he convinced himself that when the time came he would throw off the cloak of borrowed opinions, and display his true self. This man, supposedly the typical representative of capitalist society, strangely enough is always within the environs of the revolutionary movement. There is an explanation for this. Samgin and people like him were not satisfied with tsarism, which prevented them from satisfying their desires for political activity, and at the same time they understood the inevitability of revolution, were apprehensive of it, and for reasons of prudence, security, and self-preservation, tried to associate themselves with any current revolutionary movement. In reality Klim abhors the thought of an insurgency, and in 1905, even though he knows what tsarism is, he fervently hopes the Tsar will be able to deal a crippling blow to the revolution, and thus begin some new relations

with the people.

To further clarify and delineate Klim's attitude and behaviour in society, Gorki juxtaposes him against various historical and social events, in order to characterize him by his reactions. The first such incident occurs while he is walking with Inokov, and chances upon a catastrophe. A barracks in the process of construction suddenly collapses. Inokov without hesitation rushes towards the collapsed building to attempt to rescue those who had been crushed and mangled. Klim reacts differently. He remembers that when Inokov rushed towards the building he didn't follow him, but seemed to dash aside. When he thought that he was running away from the collapsing barracks, he had actually, unwittingly approached it. Later, in 1905, during the uprising, he remembers these feelings. He again does what he has no desire to do. He is sucked in by the crowd and drawn toward its middle. At such times he is beseeched by anger at his inability to stand alone, at his involuntary subjugation to a power stronger than him. His proximity or distance from the revolutionary movement depends entirely on the fortunes of that movement. If he senses that the government has the upper hand he will turn away from it immediately.

He was sure the manifest introduced by the Tsar in 1917 would obliterate the insurrectionists and their movement, and he was ready to desert them. When the revolutionary Bauman is murdered by an extreme rightist organization, the "Black Hundred," Klim accepts this turn of events as perfectly practical. Bauman had after all done what was required of him, had procured a constitution with the help of the masses to benefit the lot of the bourgeois, and now his death would help life return to its normal conditions. In other words, Klim and his kind could once again enjoy a comfortable, uninvolved existence. Needless to say, Klim is led astray by his own obtuse thinking. He does not see that the multitude following Bauman's coffin is the beginning of the battle. The Moscow proletariat builds barricades, and prepares for resistance. Klim is again angered, but offers his kitchen and his services to the revolutionaries, for should they be victorious, he is beside them, even though he strenuously doubts that such common people can have any success. During the Khodynka we are exposed once again to Klim's curious reaction to that loathsome spectacle. During the coronation of Nicholas II, thousands were crushed, yet the Tsar seemingly oblivious to what had occurred, continued with the

celebrations. Samgin moves about the crowd like a mannequin, uttering stock phrases of grief, pretending he is stricken by the tragedy, but in actuality he is overcome by a feeling of great disdain for the masses who allowed themselves to be crushed by rushing for some "sweets" given out during the festivities. The Tsar who continued to participate in the entertainment by attending a ball that same evening, he regards with respect, as a man with a strong, brave, and indomitable character. As shown by these events, Gorki does not stop for an instant in the castigation of the class represented by Samgin, who regards inhumanity as a strength, as a virtue, as something which makes him an individual, a portentous word in the proletarian vocabulary. Klim goes through life with the one outstanding thought that man is only free when he is completely alone. Realizing that he is an outsider, that he is not really needed by anyone, he rationalizes that individuality is something heroic, something elevating. However, there is nothing elevating in Klim's life. His one main task in life is to find a comfortable place, and the only thing which stands in the way of this is his collision with reality, in which he has chosen to play the role of a progressive intellectual. Fundamentally, he is indifferent



toward anyone or anything. He does not have any remarkable or notable percept about the purpose of his life, is therefore able to borrow ideas freely, and thus maintain an easy balance between his reactionary feelings, and the revolution which takes place around him.

Gorki did not complete his work, and the fourth volume which is a compilation produced from Gorki's manuscripts by Soviet scholars abounds in faults and contradictions. Samgin turned out somewhat differently to what Gorki had expected. He manages to unmask numerous characters, and thus grows in stature himself. He even supersedes Kutuzov who remains with little more than a system of stock phrases. This is the dilemma which prevented Gorki from finishing the novel. In the Soviet version, Klim is crushed by the momentous forces of the Revolution, but in reality Gorki became bogged down by dialectic problems, and was overcome by death before he could resolve them.

Diametrically opposed to Samgin is Stepan Kutuzov, with whose presence Gorki, in opposition to Samgin, wanted to show the correct path for the Russian intelligentsia to follow. Kutuzov suffers as a character just as Samgin did, but in an opposite way. Samgin presents only negative qualities: apathy, conceit, opportunism. Kutuzov is the

impeccable, irreproachable, revolutionary citizen. His faultless and flawless thoughts are supposed to convince the reader that it is people like him who will resolve the problems assailing Russia. He exhibits all the traits necessary to become a leader of the proletariat, and his reason and will are in perfect harmony. He is a man who does not have any doubts about who he is, what he is doing, or how he is going to do it. Kutuzov is always superior to his antagonists, but he is not only superior because of his marvellously organized brain, or because of his extraordinary intellect, but because his ideas, the ideas of Marxism are superior to any other trifling political dogma. Whenever Kutuzov is engaged in discussions or arguments with representatives of other ideologies, he naturally crushes them, but more often this is not enough. Almost like a *deus ex machina*, by an apt and insidiously clever phrase, he demolishes the politically immature and spiritually incomplete ramblings of the opposition. Above all, Kutuzov excels and differs from Samgin, in that even though he is acknowledged as superior to the masses, he still operates as one of them. He is not torn away from them, as is Samgin, because there is no greater unity, than the unity between the leaders of

the people and the people themselves in the Soviet Union, something which Gorki no doubt witnessed himself. At every meeting, and in every conversation between Kutuzov and Samgin, one is constantly confronted with the obvious superiority of the proletarian hero over the pale pathetic squirmings of the bourgeois intellectual. If for Kutuzov the revolution of 1905 is a serious lesson, to Samgin, it is a misunderstanding, and a tragedy. While difficult historical events (revolution, reaction, war) serve to make a man like Kutuzov strong and spiritually true, they unmask the weaklings of which Samgin is the representative. Kutuzov is at the head of the revolutionary group which actively fights the world of the Samgins. The rest of the characters it is best to subdivide into groups, representing different parts of society, as they are too numerous to deal with individually. The following people are placed into the revolutionary group: Elizaveta Spivak, Dunaev, Poyarkov, Lavrushka, Yurin, and many other workers on whom Kutuzov depends: the old stone-mason, the stoker Ilya, the carpenter Osip, Kalmykov, the dvornik Nikolai, etc., etc.

Opposite the revolutionary group, stands the capitalistic fold. This segment of society includes people from the

highest ranks, active industrialists, like Varavka and Berdnikov, as well as less significant people like Frolenko and Denisov. These characters are shown as the rulers of Imperial Russia, the actual "bosses" who are surrounded by a technical corps of civil servants, philosophers, journalists, lawyers, agitators, and gendarmes, who are also part of this group. People like Varavka regard this corps with scorn, but buy them for their own needs. Into this group could even be included such people as Preis and Stratonov, who despite their claim of an interest in Marxism, are in reality more preoccupied with developing industry and trade than worrying about a "workers'" movement. One of the most horrendous personages to Gorki was probably Dronov, who states quite plainly that since he is a man without means, it is up to him to look out for himself, and to carve out a comfortable niche for himself in society. Dronov moves successfully up the social ladder. He wants to become rich in order to show those above him that he is smarter than they are, but he does not know which part of society to join or follow. He, like Tagilskii, understands the wretchedness of bourgeois society, but cannot leave it. Dronov is the only character who comes into contact with Klim's life throughout the novel. They both studied with

Tomilin, who begins as a skeptic and an individualist, but ends prophesying Christianity; worked for Varavka, and greet the February revolution. Dronov is really inseparable from the world represented by Samgin, for he could never bring himself to leave it behind.

Closely related to the capitalists, but not suffering from the same delusions, there exists yet another group. For salvation it turns toward nihilism, skepticism, and in one case lead to strange utopian conclusions about life-- Marina Zotova's, one of the most interesting personages in the novel. She appears throughout most of the third volume while Klim tries to uncover her system of behaviour, as he does with many other characters. Marina more than anyone is symbolic of the "old" Russia which is in the process of crumbling. She is clever, self-assured, rich, and her beauty constantly tantalizes Klim. Yet he manages to unmask her as well. She is a member of a fanatic religious sect, and after witnessing her bizarre behaviour during a ritualistic performance, and thus discovering her weakness, Samgin departs. Liutov is also a member of this group. He regards the bourgeois world with skepticism, he laughs at the liberal intelligentsia for awaiting a constitution, but he does not break away from his mercantile

class, and possesses the denigrating characteristics of that class--courseness to his underlings, and a desire to cheat even people he knows, such as Turoboev, from whom he buys land. He is also conscious of, and fears an uprising by the masses, but hides behind a clown's mask from his fellows. He does discard it with Alena, the woman he loves, but she does not recognize the bitterness, shame, and sorrow which existed in him, until after his tragic suicide. Turoboev, belongs here, but he is a member of the nobility, and is therefore even farther removed from reality, something which causes him to become extremely pessimistic. He has rejected life as he sees it, nothing in it bothers him, and he adopts the only philosophy open to him, fatalism and nihilism. Turoboev also dies tragically, hit by a soldier's stray bullet in 1905.

From a presentation of the few physiognomically memorable characters found in the novel, I will turn toward the descriptive passages which occur in the book, some of which are incisive and comprehensive, and worthy of mention. Perhaps the most powerful of all, and the one which springs to mind first, is Gorki's description of an Easter religious service which memorably impresses Samgin, and which is

written with a beauty so unlike Gorki, so filled with warmth and sensitivity, that Russian critics were at a loss. They could not criticize a renowned proletarian writer like Gorki, and yet they could not allow such religious description to be ignored or unpurged, because of the possible harm it contained, which could adversely influence Soviet youth. Klim's first arrival in Petersburg, as a provincial, warned against the dangers of a shrewd, big city, is described with symbolic overtones. The gloomy, damp, muffled images are reminiscent of Dostoevski. Klim's ride through the city does not alleviate the impression of glumness, and the same tone is used in the description of his lodgings and the meeting with his brother, who has aged so much in four years that Samgin recognizes only his eyes. Bauman's funeral, is a scene of force and vigour. Gorki effectively envisages the crowd as a monolithic shuffling monster, from whose bowels issue the deep, muffled sounds of revolution. Gorki masterfully describes the marching crowd on the 9th of January, a mass which walks with determination into a wall of soldiers. He manages to show the awakening indignation and animosity of the marching crowd, more than justified by the brutal maleficent cossacks, negligently spilling blood with their

sabres. I was also impressed with, and enjoyed reading the description of the final scene in volume three, when Samgin witnesses the frenzied, nightmarish performance of Marina and her sect.

Unfortunately, the myriad acquaintances and characters whom Samgin contacts, have not received exceptional characterizations of their inner beings. Gorki has an undeniable gift for capturing external appearances, but one would hope for more, in support of an inconsequential main hero. Instead, they are flat, dull representations who serve as vehicles for the expression of Gorki's political, and philosophical ideas. They exist primarily to convey ideological ramblings, which Gorki must have enjoyed putting on paper, but as far as being characterizations of human beings participating in relationships, they are abject failures. One supposes Gorki had his reasons for writing in such a manner. The term "intellectual," to him was synonymous to the odious term "burgher." Gorki was an avowed enemy of individualism in his later stage, and in this novel he begins with a vilification of the entire family of the Samgins, who represent the "illness" of individualism. Theoretically, the author was to show bankrupt philistine ideology, and the



psychology of the individualistic members of Russian society who were holding back socialistic revolutionary development. All Gorki achieved is a very tedious book, a view of a part of society which he did not understand and despised. Basically, Gorki was suffering from the problem of his own intellectuality coming into conflict with the irrational, inhuman brutality of the Communist party, and as a result he began to write this book, in order to convert himself toward the party's simple, straightforward ideology, which could not stand close rational scrutiny, without paying undue attention to its harsh treatment of the population. His inability to finish the book, is an indication that he never resolved his own personal dilemma. While he was writing "The Life of Klim Samgin," Gorki must have admitted to himself that he had produced an imposture, a sick work, and it remains unfinished. At the time it was being written, there may have existed a need for a chronological historical novel of this type to satiate the curiosity of the newly risen Soviets about their recent historical past, and the book was instantly acclaimed as a socio-philosophical masterpiece. Unfortunately, the four volume novel is a failure as an objective presentation of the conflicts which preoccupied

the Russian intelligentsia. Gorki's main character, Klim Samgin, alternately a liberal intellectual, at times reactionary, at times non-political, is a completely negative character, and is condemned in the novel to failure because of the contradictions inherent in him. To Gorki, liberal intellectuals participated avidly in self-deception, hypocrisy, snobbery, lacked interest and ability to participate in politics, and thrived as spineless, useless creatures, who thought themselves invaluable. It is in this light that he presents his anti-hero. Gorki does not discuss historical occurrences outright, but shows them through his characters, their involvement and reaction to these events. It was his intention to include members from all parts of society, so that the novel would be a variegated picture of the existing opinions of the time. He tried to promote a repudiation of all the gross errors committed by the Russian people in the past. With "The Life of Klim Samgin," he wanted to begin anew for the future, and to solve his own personal dilemma of life, but instead, he wasted the material available to him, and produced a calamitous, lifeless work.

## CHAPTER III

Ivan Bunin was born into a landowning, although impoverished noble family in 1870 in Voronezh.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Gorki, Bunin enjoyed a formal education, but without graduating, because of a rebellious spirit which could not stand to be confined by officialdom. Bunin remained in Voronezh only three years, after which time his father's passion for wine and card gambling, as well as the family's diminishing if not depleted means, forced a move to the last remaining family estate of Butyrki, which was deep inside Russia, a Russia of forests and fields which surrounded and enchanted the young Bunin, and which he was to recount later, lyrically, with ripe perfection, in "The Life of Arsenev." His father, according to his own description, was strong, kind, not much given to logic or learning, but an avid reader. At the time when the Russian estates were collapsing and the old order was decaying, he consistently played the complete nobleman, living absurdly beyond his means, and indulging in pastimes which kept him outdoors and permitted him a long leisurely life. His mother, by his own description, was very kind, staunchly religious, gentle, sensitive, and extremely attached to her children. She was not as fortunate as his father in health, and for the last twenty years of

her life suffered from asthma. Biographical material is readily available on Bunin, so I will not expound further, other than to mention two of the works produced abroad which preceded "The Life of Arsenev." The first is "The Rose of Ierikhon," a collection of short stories which appeared in 1924, and which surprisingly did not touch upon revolution, or the events which Bunin had so recently witnessed, but delved into more metaphysical subjects, preponderant among which was death, later to occupy a large part of the philosophical consideration in "The Life of Arsenev." The other is "Mitya's Love," a poignant, and brilliantly written novellette with a very simple plot, but dealing with universal human problems of love, misunderstanding, and death. It is an impressive psychological study, and foreshadowed the main work with which I am going to deal.

"The Life of Arsenev," has been praised by almost all critics, whether they be Soviet or Emigre, as a work of exclusive beauty, merit, and as the testament of a man in Russian literature whose command of the Russian language will not soon be equalled. It is hard to describe the work as a novel because of its poetic, and impressionistic qualities. It is rather a combination of beautiful

tableaus which bring to life, tell vividly, and particularize the thoughts, reflections, and considerations of Arsenev-Bunin. In the words of Fedor Stepun,

...it is a philosophical poem, or a symphonic painting....The strength and essence of Arsenev is that in him two themes encounter and blend: the metaphysical-psychological theme of bringing to light Bunin's recollections to serve posterity, and the historical-realistic theme of the downfall of tsarist Russia.<sup>2</sup>

I would suggest that it is more a presentation of one particular life, with descriptions of modes of life, and historical events as an adjunctory background, which slowly comes into the widening sphere of vision of an internally developing hero, but more about that later. Bunin's art is such that it must be approached correctly. If one reads inattentively, or skims, one is left with no strong impression of the book. However, if one takes the time to read in a deliberate, protracted, diuturnal manner, one can savour each separate image, and delight in the rhythms and nuances of the language which unfortunately, it is almost impossible to translate. Zinaida Gippius comments on the keen and sharp powers of observation which allowed Bunin to produce such a work:

Bunin is connected with the Russian soil and with the Russian people by a mysterious inner tie....His artistic vision is most acute. I know of no other writer with such vision. The keenness of his vision impresses the reader most. Does Bunin merely relate? No, he does not. Quietly, and almost imperceptibly, he forces us to see what he himself sees.<sup>3</sup>

"The Life of Arsenev," covers the events and proceedings of almost half a century of Russian development, but with a completely different method of presentation to Gorki's attempt. Bunin, because he was cut off from Russia, utilizes his memory, and the recollections of his youth and adolescence, but the book is not simply a memoir, even though it cannot be denied that Bunin used his own life, parents, and position as a basis for the novel. It remains a "contrived" syllabus of recollections, honed and transformed by great artistry. It is now concurred, in fact, that many persons and places in the novel have real-life prototypes. Bunin's father Aleksei Nikolaevich, becomes Aleksander Sergeevich Arsenev in the novel. His brother Yulii, who became a populist, becomes Georgii in the novel, an eternal student who hobs-nobs with forward thinking members of the statistical corps. His other brother Evgenii, becomes Nikolai, who settles into a stable married life. His grandmother's estate (Ozerino) becomes Baturino, his teacher Ramashkov becomes Baskakov, the farmhouse (Butyrki) becomes Kamenka, and so forth. Bunin's romantic involvements with a neighbour's maidservant Emilia, (Ankhen), and the difficult, almost tragic, sensitive affair with Vera Pashchenko, which is described with

great potency and vitality in the fifth part--Lika, are all taken from actual experiences. Bunin's wife, V. V. Muromtseva, in her memoirs rejected the concept that "The Life of Arsenev", is autobiographical, especially the part about Lika, however, her reaction may be biased. Bunin himself would become incensed when it was said at times that "The Life of Arsenev" is autobiographical, but a quotation from M. Aldanov who knew him well, settles the problem.

Of course Arsenev is not Bunin, but there is very much of Bunin in him; his thoughts, his feelings, his views of life, and his relations with people.<sup>4</sup>

It must be pointed out that the novel is not only a lyrical and emotional retelling of a Russia on the wane which remained in the mind of the author, but the events which occur in the life of Arsenev are used in such a way that they are transformed into the lifelong questionings of "everyman" about life, love, and death. The book begins with the first impressions of the youthful and adolescent Arsenev: his life on the estate, his pride for his first boots and whip, and his first glimpse of the strange adult world where such things exist as murderers and prisoners. Arsenev's venture away from home as a boarder in the house

of a merchant, his experiences in school, his pride in his new uniform and books, his inimitable natural surroundings, impoverished manor houses, his sojourn in the provincial hotel for nobles with his father, his first horse, and hunt, delicately provide the atmosphere which molds his moral and philosophical conceptions. Descriptions in general are such that they mingle imperceptibly with the story line, and serve only to accentuate it. The passing away of the nobility is shown veiled with sadness, dejection, and weariness. Here one dramatic scene inculcates indelibly on the mind the stultification and end of an epoch in Russian history. It is Arsenev's witnessing of the burial of the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich abroad, which is alternated with his memories of the Duke as a dashing, powerful figure travelling in a sumptuous Imperial train. Polychromes of schoolmasters, peasants, their children, merchants, statisticians, editors, redolent masses, for which he feels some aversion, etc., etc., reveal Arsenev-Bunin's keen observations. That which makes these images remain in our minds, is Bunin's command and use of his language. Everything has been condensed until there is only the essential left to present a sharp picture. Bunin was in the habit of constantly reworking



his material, and as he changed with time, so he would try to amend his works.

The beautiful panorama which permeates the book, and fills it with the sights, sounds, and smells of a living Russia would have been a considerable achievement in itself, but Bunin utilizes it for the development of the protagonist, Alexei Arsenev, from early youth until his first serious romantic involvement with Lika. Through the various parts of the book, Arsenev's philosophy of life gradually emerges. He is very definitely part of the nobility, and his sentiments lie with class. He is conscious of his family's long, noble ancestry, and he is proud of the name he carries. He is thoroughly in favour of everything Russian, be it a peasant with whom he hitches a ride, or the Baskakov family, representing a staunch middle class Russia, with whom he shares simple food, or as a helper to the peasants in the field, working with a scythe himself, he seems to blend easily into different social strata, and at the same time remains aloof from them. Later on, he voices his regret and sorrow at the passing of the Russia he had experienced, and wonders why all those who were so fervently Russian did not come

to its aid and defence. He asks about the pride which existed in every Russian:

...what became of it later when Russia was perishing? Why did we not defend all that which we so proudly called Russian, and in the strength and truth of which it seemed we were so convinced?<sup>5</sup>

With his brother's circle of friends, he meets and discusses, but does not share their ideas, and in fact is angered by many of them. He is very scornful of common people with revolutionary tendencies, as exemplified by his description of a man called Melnik:

He was scrubby, lean, rickety, of sandy yellow colour, blear-eyed and snuffling, but extremely violent and self-opinionated; many years after to my complete surprise, he turned out to be a great personage, some kind of "corn dictator"...<sup>6</sup>

Arsenev was much more of an idealist than his brother's acquaintances, craving "goodness, humaness, justice!"<sup>7</sup> He abhorred any restrictions being placed on human activity, which people at these meetings suggested. He could not see himself devoting a lifetime to bringing out and edifying drunken peasants, or working for a nameless community.

In the descriptions of Arsenev's life, his family, and travels, there is no feeling of movement of historical time. Everything that Arsenev sees and describes seems

as eternal as a gravure, and can be compared to Proust's "A la Recherche du Temps Perdu," except that it is strongly nationalistic, in opposition to Proust's more cosmopolitan approach, and can best be understood by a Russian reader.

In plan, the novel covers approximately twenty four years of the author's life, from birth until his parting with Lika, but in actuality it goes much farther, with references to the history of the Arsenev family, and emigre commentary in the chapters on youth, right up to his obviously more mature literary period. Another particularity of the book, is the absence of nearly any dialogue. In the first four books there is virtually none, and it is only in the fifth, dealing with Lika, that some appears. This is because the novel deals almost exclusively with the internal development of its major character. It is the story of the formation of his world, and it is invaluable, because it enables us to peer into the inner sanctum of a writer.

Through the novel the theme of "death," which I previously mentioned, runs like an undercurrent, and it is necessary to discuss it in order to understand the other two themes, life and love, which eventually triumph. From the first page, Arsenev-Bunin explains that one's

consciousness of death, enables one to appreciate life more. He is one of those people who live in constant thought about and preoccupation with death. Death occurs many times in the novel, and each time causes Arsenev to question life. The first such episode occurs with the tragedy of the shepherd boy Senka, who is crushed by his horse, followed by the death of Aliosha's little sister Nadya, and the death of his grandmother. One of the more vivid parts of the book is the extinction of a handsome, part-gipsy, neighbouring landowner, whose life is extinguished suddenly and without purpose. Arsenev recoils from the horror of this death, but it is interesting to note that rather than express condolences, he thinks of himself, and ponders the value of life, which can be taken away with such ease. It is not until much later, when he is present at the death of the Grand Duke in France, already in exile, does he break down, and weep passionately, and ends book four with a roaring, booming description of the night, of the mistral which wafts uphill, and the irresistible, incontestable, fluxing, cataclysmic, surging powers of Nature, in front of which he makes the sign of the Cross.

Death is such a pervasive subject with Arsenev-Bunin,

that the fifth part, "Lika," which deals with Arsenev's love for a woman, is not exclusive of it. In several instances the author brings in "death," even when it is not in the sequence of events, such as the thoughts of the young Arsenev about his mother, into which later memories of her death are injected

And is it really possible that she whose eyeless skull and grey bones are lying somewhere there, in the church-yard grove of an out-of-the-way Russian town, at the bottom of a now nameless grave, is it really possible that she it was who used once to rock me in her arms...<sup>8</sup>

In the same way, he describes the deaths of Nikolai Nikolaevich and Lika, events which are actually outside the scope of the book.

The theme of love, which is the second great theme in this work, constantly either appears before death scenes or crosses them, so that the two intertwine. After Arsenev's first episode in love with Ankhen, when in a sledge on a wintry night he for the first time holds her hand and experiences an awkward kiss, the following chapter describes Pisarev's unexpected death. On his second encounter with love, in the editor's office of "The Voice," when he is first introduced to Lika, who

became a passionate and exasperating experience in his life, immediately following in the next chapter, is the Imperial train with the young Duke aboard, with the body of his father, an incident which almost by destiny passes through Arsenev's life. What it is important to note, is that love remains triumphant when it is juxtaposed with death. It wins out, it becomes ineradicably rooted in Arsenev's memory, and leaves only pleasant rememorative evocations in him for the rest of his life.

Here it would be opportune to analyze Arsenev's feelings and relations with people, especially his family, and the women who appear in his life. He is primarily and irrevocably attached to his family, with his most tender feelings and sympathies directed toward his father, from early days when he was a symbol of courage and straightforwardness, until much later when through irrational actions and drink he had ruined the family, Arsenev would at an instant forgive him. For his mother he had in his own words "the bitterest love of all my life".<sup>9</sup>

Mother was to me, among all the rest, quite a special being, inseparable from my own, and I probably noticed and felt her at the same time as myself.<sup>10</sup>

He makes friends easily without distinction of class: a little under-herdsman, Baskakov his tutor, Glebochka, etc. With the peasants he has an easy manner, and they in turn seem to like him. It is perhaps right to point out that his attitude to the peasants is such as it is, only as long as they remain within their own framework, a predestined place with which they should be content. His brothers, who were older than him, and thus living in a different world, he regards with tremendous pride, and probably as any youth, hopes to emulate them. He is in closer contact with Georgii, who encourages him to study, causes him great distress when he is banished for "socialist" activities, and in the end brings him into a society in Kharkov, which he had not previously known.

His feelings toward, and relationships with women, the expression of love, and its presentation as one of the most powerful and all-consuming feelings man is capable of experiencing, is another of the more striking features in the novel. For Arsenev, this feeling, together with the feeling of physical attractiveness for "woman" begins at an early age. His first inkling or response to the female form occurs when he sees his brother Nikolai with a pretty, slender peasant girl, Sashka, and then these

incomprehensible feelings intensify and are committed to memory when he sees her talking to his mother one day on the porch of the manor. He next becomes conscious of girls during his school days: an evening ball, the recollections of which intoxicated him, and his introduction to Nalya, a girl with whom he falls in love sight unseen. His first exploratory contact with the opposite sex comes with Ankhen, a young German girl. That interlude lasted an entire winter, following which he comes under the sway of a new love, Lisa Bibilova, up to his first complete physical union with the alluring peasant girl Tonka, an event which rightly revolutionized his world. The portraits of the women in this book are truly marvellous. They fill Arsenev with mysterious romantically veiled feelings toward femininity, first of youth, then of adolescence. Each episode is one of passionate yet discreet images which lead the very sensitive Arsenev toward his stirring and momentous romance with Lika.



Lika is an exceptional work which has evolved from a memory sharpened by time and anguish. It is not a work without a few minor faults, but the overall impression it produces, overwhelms its shortcomings. It is an emotive, heart-expanding, poignant work, it is afflicting and moving, and perhaps what is most important, it is meticulously honest. As it was published as a separate work when it appeared for the first time, I will also treat it as such, even though it is obviously intertwined with the story line of the four "books" previous to it. Arsenev first meets Lika, for whom a state of expectation has been gradually prepared through his preceding encounters, and who becomes the climatic event of his early life and relationships, at the end of book four, and their seemingly ordinary romance, develops into a quite extraordinary work. What is not ordinary is the manner of presentation, a sensitive emotional manifestation of recollections, veiled with regrets, common to all mankind, when it is too late to go back and correct or change situations and events the importance of which one was not cognizant of at the time they were occurring. "Lika," is infused with the

egoistically callous behaviour of Arsenev-Bunin which he does not recognize as such at the time, thinking of it merely as his search for freedom, and only appraising it accurately from a much later period. Again, as in the other four books, the most important part of the work is the relationship and development of the two main personalities, with the support of various smaller characters such as Arsenev's brother, Lika's father and brother, and Arsenev's family, to which he returns in his bitterest moment, to find it incredibly, in his eyes, aged, brutally impoverished, in desolation, and at the end of life.

When I think of my father, I always feel repentant. It always seems that I did not value and love him enough. Each time I feel guilty that I know too little about his life, especially his youth--I made too little effort to find out about it, when it was possible! I constantly attempt, and yet cannot fully understand, what kind of a man he was, -- a man of a special century, of a special generation....ll

His involvement with Lika, serves as the starting point for his first step, and then entrenchment into manhood and maturity. From their early meetings in her father's house, (a liberal doctor), where he would

spend an entire day content to sit and look at her, entranced by his variegated feelings of growing love for her, they journey to the end of an affair which affected Arsenev-Bunin in a very strong and lasting manner. Her father warns them against a conciliatory union, in which there was no future, but despite his advice, they both contrive to meet in Orel, and spend a winter there, where she is not yet completely committed toward Arsenev, who experiences great and shattering jealousies when she is complimented by other men, especially in a finely described scene of an evening ball, because of his as yet orderless and fluxional character.

Their life together is interrupted temporarily with the arrival of her father from the provinces, with an eligible suitor in tow, who would be able to support Lika, unlike the materially impoverished poet. His pride stung by her seemingly frivolous behaviour, Arsenev does not stop her from leaving town with her father, despite her rejection of the suitor. During his period of loneliness, Arsenev travels in the expectation of something, any development or incident to occupy his mind, but in time sends a telegram to

Lika, who offers herself to him forever. In his love for Lika which is sincere, there is much that is egotistical. When fully convinced of her love for him, Arsenev enjoys other women, and even relates these incidents to Lika. He travels without her, often leaving her alone, and after vowing once never to travel again, within the next few days, casually, is off again. This is reminiscent of Bunin in real life who in his egregiousness did not want women to make demands on him, and as he expresses clearly in the book, "It seemed to me that I loved her so much that everything was allowed me, everything was forgiveable." 12

V. Veidle wrote about this same matter, but I do not agree with his opinions wholeheartedly.

The tragic discord, whose end result is Lika's death, and the opening of a never to be healed wound in the soul of Arsenev, is brought about by nothing more than the thirst of creativity, which gives birth to such greed for life, that it inevitably spills over the borders of the contents of one individual life. No matter how real Arsenev's love may be, Lika cannot be its only object... through her it turns to everything in the world. His sinful behaviour to Lika develops through all its stages not because of the atomizing of his attentions or feelings, but because of the absorption of his entire being by that same, once and for always set artistic problem.13

I do not entirely agree, especially with the last part of that statement, but rather feel that it was Arsenev-Bunin's youthful immaturity which prompted the indifference and disregard for the interests and feelings of his loved one, in the later part of their affair, which causes its breakup, and which he will later passionately regret. As Lika says to him:

Only you are too severe toward me. Each of my dreams you call trivial, deprive me of everything, and yet do not refuse yourself anything.<sup>14</sup>

After Lika leaves him, his surrounding becomes futile, achromatic, etiolated, irrelevant, and filled with despair. The sights which had previously induced blissful happiness now become faded, sombre, bleak. His train carriage becomes fetid, humdrum, boring; his home is in miserable and barbaric deterioration; he is filled with remorse, guilt, sorrow, dejection, and from this point, will begin the expansion and progression of his artistic substantiality, his being. He finds out in the following spring, that she had died within a week after leaving him, but wanted it to remain a secret. He ends the book with a dream of his beloved Lika, a final avowal of the recurrent thematic

postulation that love surmounts and prospers over the dismay and loathsomeness of death, that their felicitious enchanted joint life, which he then did not treat with enough care, remains imprinted in his memory forever, untouched by time.

...I saw her hazily, but with such strong love, joy, with such corporeal and spiritual nearness, as I had never before experienced toward anyone, ever.<sup>15</sup>

The genius of Bunin's writing is that he shows us an as yet inexperienced, bristling, sensuous youth who is going through the pains of growing up. A fact that tends to get obscured by the emotional force expressed in the relationship between Lika and Arsenev is that he is after all, only twenty years old. At that age he suffers ignominiously the slightest infringements on his pride. He is constantly being hurt by the most delicate occurrences, an officer delaying Lika's hand in his own as an example, but when he has come irrevocably, in his mind, in full possession of Lika, through youthful vitality and in search of different experiences, he branches out into travel and the unavoidable physical attraction and experimentation with other women.

Lika is more mature than her male counterpart, and it is only because of her, after she leaves him, that Arsenev goes through a complete reappraisal of his position. His emotional contact with Lika, especially after she left him, and he learned of her death, causes him to become firmly entrenched in that direction of life which allowed him to recollect the value of what he had held in his hands. When he does understand what he had lost in Lika, only then does he step into a period of maturity. Arsenev is a character with an ever widening perception of the world and this perception is greatly expanded by Lika. Even though she was fully and emphatically in love with him, she realized that because of his youth, his poetic nature, and his egocentric particularities, he was not ready to embark with her towards the life which she envisaged.

Their relationship, either when they are together or apart, demonstrates their individual personalities. Lika hopes eventually for marriage and children. However this was an alien idea, at least at that time, to the free-soaring Arsenev-Bunin. She disagrees with him on art forms, cannot understand his hatred of the theatre, nor does she understand his poetry which she

calls constant descriptions of weather. Arsenev, in his turn admits that he is not an easy person to live with, that he has very strong and definite views on what life should be like, how it "enraptures" him, but his methods for attaining this life, at his early age, preclude others from participating in it. In one of the few conversations in the book with Lika, he explains his views:

People constantly await good fortune, something interesting, dream of some joy, of some event. That is the attraction of the open road. Then freedom, spaciousness...novelty, which is always festive, elevates the feeling of life, and this is after all what we all want, search for in every strong feeling.<sup>16</sup>

There are a few interesting comments on Arsenev's methods of description and methods of seeing his surroundings. He would jot down fragmented impressions, and then solidify them on the strength of his language.

To write! One should write about roofs, galoshes, backs, and not at all "to struggle against arbitrary rule and violence, to defend the downtrodden and destitute, to portray vivid characters, to paint embracing pictures of the contemporary world, public sentiments and trends!"<sup>17</sup>

His observations he regards not as an exemplification of a greater social comment, but simply as an impression



of an object which is artistically valid by itself. His descriptions of nature, which I have not yet dealt with, I leave for the next chapter, where they can be more advantageously displayed, when placed beside the methods utilized by Gorki.

## CHAPTER IV

Gorki began his literary career with descriptions of tramps gleaned from his travels about southern Russia. He quickly progressed to the position of Romantic Revolutionary and Social Realist. While Gorki was doubting his position on Bolshevism, and thus lived abroad, Bunin at the same time was ignored and hushed up by the Soviets. Abroad, Gorki entered the realm of Western literature with his early writings, but in his later period, he reverted to local themes. Bunin on the other hand emerged as a humanist, as a writer whose works have become not only Russian, but supranational classics. As I have mentioned before, one of the difficulties in comparing the two works, is that they are written in different genres, in epic and lyrical keys. This situation, however, does not in any way impede a comparative analysis of what each author was trying to achieve: a perception and visualization of life around them, and its presentation to the reader.

One can see, after reading the "Life of Klim Samgin," that it was an attempt by Gorki to take stock of himself. As he developed from his rebellion against Russian society, through his period of hostility for the bourgeois intelligentsia which could not stop whining at the misfortune of their circumstances, to the position of public crier of Social

Realism, and a sympathizer of Bolshevism and Lenin; his rationality and the intellectualism, which he had gained through his assiduous and voracious reading, estranged him from that ideology which he was supposedly representing. The awesome power of the dictator to inflict terror and confine freedom frightened Gorki, and he turned to the preservation of Russian culture and tradition. In 1921 at Lenin's request he emigrated abroad. In 1925 he began to write "The Life of Klim Samgin," in order to appraise, criticize, evaluate, and resolve the anti-communist feelings which he had engendered in 1917.

I will now compare and contrast the structure of the two works, and the authors' attitude toward the reader; Gorki's and Bunin's view of the upper-class family, and the upbringing and ensuing development of the chief characters in those surroundings; the behaviour of both characters toward women, as one of the themes which emerges from both works; the authors' way of looking at, describing, and using the natural world which surrounds them; the manner in which secondary characters are developed by Gorki; the authors' language and style, and finally, how each work succeeds or fails in the presentation of a Russian intellectual.

I will begin by analyzing the diverse presentations

of history and historical backgrounds as one of the themes existing in both works. For Gorki, the theme of history looms in the work as a foreplan. It serves as the springboard from which the main hero vaults into society, and which causes his ensuing development. Gorki's style is realistic, and effectively so. In fact, the descriptions of the mass scenes are one of the strong points of the novel. Bunin has a completely different approach. His novel is impressionistic, made up of partial and segmented observations which are then knitted into a complete, if diffused picture. Historical events are not explicitly revealed, they are more "felt," through descriptions of life and existence. A good example of this is the representation of peasants in both works. In Gorki's they are shown as oppressed and beaten elements of society who willingly step out for the Revolution, when essentially the opposite was true. The peasants, the ordinary "mouzhiks," were one of the most conservative parts of Russian society, and held to their tightly organized and traditional behaviour for as long as was possible against any revolutionary movement. In Bunin's work a much more human picture of the peasant evolves. There is no mention of political strife or ideology, as is rampant in Gorki's

writing. Bunin manages to show them as people with their own desires, problems, and interests. It is true that in his book they remain in their own villages, at their own level of society, completely apart from the privileged upper classes, but there is no antagonism on either part, Arsenev's or the peasants' toward each other. Gorki's style is realistic in opposition to Bunin's impressionism in many other ways. Gorki's descriptions of the tedium of everyday life, work, travel, are given in a rather straightforward, sometimes grotesquely coloured manner, as any man of ordinary intelligence would see conditions surrounding him. Bunin sees things in a different way. He sees everything with a poetic eye. The smallest incident, his selling of grain to a trader, assumes expanded literary meaning. His observations are minute, and they are made in such a way that they acquire importance simply by existing and providing beauty or feeling for those who are able to see them.

The structure of both works is completely different. Gorki has drawn out his novel to such an extent that at times it loses continuity, while at the same time meshing into an almost constant diatribe. The divisions which are present in the book are artificial and of not much

purpose, they do not define or subdivide the books into a coherent structure. In fact, the only impression of planning that went into the writing is that each book will usually end or propose an event of historical consequence, and each new volume will begin with a discussion of that event. The complete effect of Gorki's book, is that the author is doing his utmost to convince us of the worthlessness of the class represented by Klim Samgin, and the superiority of the segment of society headed by Kutuzov. This aspect of leading one forcibly to a predetermined conclusion, the feeling of persuasion and inducement which exists in the novel, I found rather offensive. Bunin's approach is much easier to accept. He develops his book in such a way that he makes us comprehend the inner workings of his main hero, he develops him in such a way that when we do understand his workings, we are ready to participate in his problems, and at the same time to outlast and to overcome them. Such is the first inkling of the two types of intellectual beings who are presented by two authors from different camps.

An analysis of the two main characters will show the hopelessness on the part of Gorki to attempt to convince any thinking and knowledgeable Russian that

Klim was and behaved like a member of the intelligentsia.

Klim essentially, is a walking, talking robot, spouting borrowed and programmed ideas, maxims, and opinions.

In his few moments of self-reflection and self-consideration, he does in a devious way admit that he is talentless, and we find out that his erudition is that of a dilettante.

He skips on the surface of literature, politics, economics, etc., and thus automatically disqualifies himself from membership in the class which he ostensibly represents, and becomes a unique, unsuccessful, and dissatisfied

man. Klim's formative years are a direct contribution to the type of person he becomes. He is instilled with the ideas that the intelligentsia is sacrificing itself for the good of the people, that it is not appreciated, that its rightful place is at the head of the masses, but he is obviously, for lack of talent, not the right type of person to assume such a position. In his early

years he is praised for witty sayings gleaned from other people, and for the repetition of absurdities.

This unquestionably leads to his further ineffectual development. He cannot achieve on his own a definite view of life, or what his role must be in it. From this stems his failure. Being born into an intellectual

family, and being in intellectual surroundings, does not mean that he is a person of intellectual inclinations. That is something that Gorki failed to understand when he chose to make a symbolic vehicle out of the unfortunate Klim.

Bunin's Arsenev, is quite the opposite from hapless Klim, and indeed he, Arsenev, can be said to calmly, forcefully, and usefully represent the intelligentsia. Here is someone for whom studies were of incomplete invigoration, someone, whom one might surmise through Gorki's epithets, who has grown up the son of a profligate landowner, and who would instinctively proceed in the same degenerative way. But what saves Arsenev is his intellectual and creative capacity. On his own inclination he is sufficiently interested and capable in letters to achieve a certain notoriety, and does so without any prodding. Anyone who is capable of not remaining in a stagnant position, who is interested in his own cultural and intellectual advancement, naturally becomes part of the intelligentsia. Arsenev does not remain at his family's estate any longer than is necessary. He is avidly interested in travel, in meeting people, in appreciating his surroundings and



experiences as much as is humanly possible. He is receptive towards nature, the seasons, love, work, the ideological conversations of his brother's friends, etc., whereas Samgin concentrates only on his own personal material amelioration and condition. Arsenev is constantly going forward, but Samgin freezes forever at a certain level, immobile until his death. The family which exerts definite pressure on its developing young members is also very differently presented in each work. In Samgin's case it is an unsuccessful, somehow inhumane, and disunited array of personalities. Klim does not receive love, understanding or care. His mother is being assailed by lovers, among whom we find Tomilin, and Varavka, who takes her as his full time mistress. Therefore, from her side, no emotional attachment occurs. His father who was constantly away on journies, at first felt a predilection for Klim as something "special", but also turns in the end toward his brother Dimitri. Thus, from the very beginning Klim is left on his own to propel himself as best he can. There is no feeling of warm human relationships imparted to him at any stage, as I will comment upon later in regards to his behaviour with women. I have spoken previously of Arsenev's very

strong attachment to his family, which provided him with security, love, understanding and self-confidence, that allowed him to achieve a strong independent and clear, appreciatory outlook on life. I am not trying to say that Gorki's type of family did not exist, but simply that the relations between its members are dull, languid, almost indolent, a situation not suitable for the production of an enlightened member. The first volume of the four, I indeed felt to be the strongest, for it shows the formative years of Klim, and is interesting as a picture of a rural provincial family, when political considerations have not yet appeared.

As an extension of his upbringing, Klim regards women in a way completely uncharacteristic to anyone whom one would class as a member of an informed intelligentsia. He approaches women only because of his sexual desire. He contrives to pass time with them only for sexual gratification. Arsenev reacts completely differently. To him the most important part of any relationship with women is spiritual nearness. I am not denying that physical attraction also stimulates him, but it is not nearly as crude or offensive as it becomes with Klim. Sex for Arsenev becomes a secondary

consideration, or more an expression of his feelings as the culmination of emotional contact and acquaintance. Another weak aspect of Gorki's in the creation of women, is that they are all representatives of various ideologies. He does not present them as human beings with political inclinations, but rather bases his entire character on a certain ideology, and induces the character to act from that starting point. Nekhaeva is a decadent, Marina represents the Khlysty sect, Nikonova is a government agent, Spivak is a revolutionary, etc. Everyone has a pigeon hole into which he fits, and beyond which he does not stray. This "social lining," which every character wears, only makes it more difficult for the reader to accept him. With Bunin, each woman is feminine, romantic, gentle. With Gorki, not one of those words applies.

Before carrying on with an analysis of the points of language, manner of descriptions and literary devices in the two works, I would briefly like to return to the topic of the intellectuals, and their attitudes, as are found in Bunin. As I have said before, Bunin tends to present peasants in a more human way than Gorki, not merely as slogan carriers, but he does express certain

sentiments which are probably the result of his  
 "landowner's" upbringing.

...I simply could not bear to be reminded, even jokingly (and yet of course edifyingly): "A poet you need not be, but a citizen you must be!" --when that "Mustness" was imposed on me, when I was being instructed, even indirectly, allegorically that the whole meaning of life lies "in work for the good of the community," in other words, for the peasants or workers. I felt beside myself. What! Must I sacrifice myself for the sake of some everlastingly drunken locksmith.... 1

The problem of attitudes is a philosophical one, and therefore difficult to discuss.

And now there is nothing, but that talk of "repaying one's debt to the people".... But I don't feel, nor cannot, nor do I wish to, sacrifice myself for the people's sake, or "serve" it, or play, as my father puts it, at parties and problems at the county assemblies. 2

I cannot say whether such a statement is wrong or not, it is entirely personal, and I think best to leave it at that. I tend to agree much more with Bunin's depiction of the Russian revolutionary, than with Gorki's. Arsenev's brother strikes me as a much more plausible, idealistic, if misguided young man, than the horrendous Kutuzov.

And what, generally speaking, is a Russian protestant, a rebel, a revolutionary, always ridiculously severed from reality and despising it, unwilling to submit himself in the slightest measure to reason, to calculation, to inconspicuous, unhurried, unobtrusive activity? ...Ideas were very well; but in those youthful revolutionaries how much was there also of the mere longing for gay idleness under the cloak of hectic activity, of self-intoxication with meetings, noise, songs, all sorts of clandestine dangers...<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps one of the biggest differences in the two authors is their method of looking at, and describing Nature. Bunin presents it as one of the forces inseparable from the activities of men. Bunin's impressions or descriptions are not overflowing with activity, nor are they a sumptuous picture of vitality, but they do have one clear encompassing characteristic, which gives them absolute strength, their exactitude. He will never use general terms for any object which he wishes us to see, but will use the correct name or term. This may prove difficult for the average reader to follow, but by his exact and apt use of terminology, no confusion can occur. He comes into such close proximity to the object he is describing, that we can see it as clearly as he does himself. His precision extends to colours, sounds, odours, and he transmits the exact sensation which they produce in him. In the natural changing world, which does not remain still for an instant, he captures

a moment which has surprised or availed itself to him with just the exact word to evoke the necessary picture. His infusion of colour and tincture into his descriptions, and the plasticity with which they are molded, is inimitable. As he states in the novel:

For a long time I would tremble from head to foot at the very sight of a box of paints, daub paper from morn to night, and stand for hours looking at flowers, sunlight, and shadows, and at that marvellous blueness of the sky, bordering on the mauve, which shows on a hot day facing the sun, among the tree-tops bathing as it were in that blueness; and I became for ever imbued with a deep sense and consciousness of the truly divine meaning and significance of the colours of earth and sky.<sup>4</sup>

One of the descriptions which lingers in one's memory is his masterful portrayal of the last August days before his departure for school. He accompanies his father on a hunt, and the surrounding natural world, already tinted with autumn colours, reveals to them its treasury of beauty. There is a constant alternation of seasons, and he can capture their essence simply and unobtrusively:

...the vast tree already thinned by autumn, picturesquely defaced by the autumn rain storms and first frost, bespattered with rotting leaves, its trunks and branches blackened and with motley remnants of its yellow and red garb; a fresh bright morning; the dazzling sunlight glittering on the lawns and descending in warm golden pillars among the distant trunks into the damp coolness and shadow of the ground, into the thin smoke of the still lingering morning mist shining ethereally blue;...<sup>5</sup>

or an equally effective interpretation of spring:

Looking at the tree one morning, you are struck by the abundance of buds that have covered it during the night. And after a certain time the buds suddenly burst forth--and the black pattern of the twigs is at once strewn with countless bright-green flecks. Then the first cloud comes over, the first thunder roars, the first warm shower comes rushing down and again a miracle happens: the tree has become so dark, so splendid in comparison with its bare tracery of yesterday, has spread out its wide glossy greenery so thick and far, stands in such beauty and strength of young firm foliage, that you simply cannot believe your eyes.<sup>6</sup>

In Book Two, Chapter X, his picture of winter is one of the best found anywhere in Russian literature. To be fully appreciated, it must be read in entirety.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Bunin's word-paintings of his natural surroundings, is their elemental influence in the formation of Arsenev-Bunin's character, but he does not restrict this influence only to himself. Nature mirrors the joys and anguishes of man, it reacts to and accompanies his inner struggles. As Charles Ledre states in his book on Bunin:

Le decor lui-meme appartient au drame: il materialise les sentiments des personnages, il les traduit au dehors, on dirait volontiers: il les orchestre.<sup>7</sup>

There are innumerable passages which I would like to

quote to further illustrate what I am trying to show, for it is impossible to comment with trite language on Bunin's descriptions, as they speak for themselves. As one goes along in the book one finds that after marvelling at one passage, immediately following is another of even greater symmetry and beauty. This display of talent, causes one to be very dogmatic in trying to demonstrate to those as yet uninitiated, the beauty of colour and language which belonged to Bunin, and in trying to induce them to share in the pleasure of reading this work. Paustovski makes an interesting comparison between Bunin's work and Nesterov's painting "Sainte Russie."

This picture has something in common with the books of Bunin. However, there is one difference. Bunin's people are completely real and known to all, and his country is much more unpretentious and poorer than Nesterov's.<sup>8</sup>

Bunin's language and stylistic method one might imagine to be of great complexity, but in truth, it is very simple, clear and pictorial. Through unpretentiousness of style, and lack of ornamentation, he achieves great richness in levels of language, and in abundance and magnificence of images. Bunin has in effect developed a new genre in prose writing. He has discovered a rhythmical quality



in prose which enables him to construct his "novel" as a prose poem. He has found a rhythm which he utilizes in producing a melodious work. With his command of his native tongue, and use of his tremendous talent, he produced a beauteous, exquisite work. In the words of Paustovski:

It is a fusion of all earthly grief, charms, considerations and joys. It is the amazing gathering of the occurrences of one life, of roamings, countries, cities, seas; but in the centre of these multitudinous images of the world, is our Middle Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Gorki also wrote about fairly simple, fluxing, realities of everyday living, but he observed events in a twisted, ornamented, forced, and artificial style. He declared at every opportunity that writing should be as simple, truthful, clear, and exact as possible, that it was necessary to throw out everything that was excessively decorative which could detract from easy understanding of the text, yet in "The Life of Klim Samgin," he achieved very few of his own objectives. His ideal was probably to be able to see the world as Bunin did, and to present it with Bunin's talent, but he failed completely to do so, and his attempt hatched a style which at times is embarrassing for its crudeness and unnatural images. Gorki's desire to become a word-painter, to achieve artistic palpability

in his characters and locations, results at best in a kind of strained presentation. His work is filled with innumerable literary devices, but instead of blending harmoniously into the narrative, they dissect it by their pretentiousness.

Gorki's descriptions of nature when compared with Bunin's are at best laconic. His epithets and metaphors usually present it as cold and dull. Gorki is not content to provide natural landscapes for their own sake. Weather, nature, and seasons tend to exist for the purpose of acting on a character in coming to some conclusion about man's social position in society. I should add that what descriptions there are, occur infrequently, and are usually short. I am including a few examples which are characteristic for this work.

Vytsvetshee, tuskloe solntse mertvo torchalo  
sredi serinkoi ovchiny oblakov...<sup>10</sup>

V okno smotrelo serebryanoe solntse, nebo--takoe  
zhe kholodno goluboe...<sup>11</sup>

Zarya, bystro izmenyaya tsveta svoi, teper  
okrasila nebo v ton staroi, deshevenkoi  
oleografii...<sup>12</sup>

Even when he is abroad in such light-filled places as Geneva and Paris, his descriptions still convey gloom

and dark colours.

Gory prikryty i smyagcheny golubovatym tumanom...  
Sinevatoe tumanno nebo...<sup>13</sup>

These colours are carried over into descriptions of  
Russia as well.

Samginu nrazilos ezdit po kaprizno izognutym  
dorogam, po beregam lenivvykh rek i pereleskami.  
Mutnogolubye dali, sinevataya mgla lesov...<sup>14</sup>

Unlike Bunin's constantly changing and alternating  
scenario, there is almost no perception of the different  
seasons in Gorki's work, but an all-pervasive atmosphere  
of fog, rain, wetness, surrounds and seemingly points  
out the harshness and inhospitability of big cities.

Gustoi tuman okutyval gorod, i khotya bylo ne  
bole trekh chasov popoludni, Nevskii prospekt  
pytalis osvetit raduzhnye puzyri fonarei,  
pokhozhykh na gigantskie oduvanchiki. <sup>15</sup>

Gorki's strength lies in his intimate knowledge of the  
lexicons of various classes. Each of his characters  
speaks with the jargon which belongs to the class which  
he is representing. Gorki's characters in fact become  
placed or located at a certain level in society by their  
language. The deacon's speech is filled with archaisms  
and expressions which are natural to a man of the church.

Tomilin utilizes scientific and studied terminology, Lyutov speaks with the language belonging to the commercial class, Margarita's speech is resplendant with popular sayings, and the colourful expressions of the common people. Elena speaks with the sophisticated language of the salons, and Klim has structured his language from those he contacts, and thus has his own conglomerate style.

In his descriptions of people, Gorki stresses their outer appearance and their mannerisms, coupled to their speech, to provide what he hopes is an understanding of the character. He also tries to make us see and understand the character through variations in their descriptions as they age, change, and pass through the novel. There are endless descriptions of Lidia, first when she is young, seen in bright colours;

Litso ee tozhe zagorelo do tsveta bronzy,  
tonenkuyu stroinuyu figurku krasivo oblegalo  
sinee plate, v nei bylo chto-to neobychnoe,  
udivitelnoe, kak v devochkakh tsyrka. 16

Later when she has gone through difficult times, we get a new picture of her.

Ee figura, okutannaya dymchatoi shalyu, kazalas  
ploskoi. 17

Dronov, before achieving his desire to become wealthy, behaves in a manner quite different to when he is moneyed, and Gorki shows his change in behaviour and attitude by pictures of his appearance and mannerisms.

Izredka, ostonozhnoi pokhodkoi bitogo kota v kabinet Varavki prokholdil Ivan Dronov...<sup>18</sup>

Sam on byl odet shchegolevato, zhydenkie volosy ego smazany kakim-to zhyrom i forsisto prichesany na koso i probor. Ego novenkie botinki negromko i vezhlivo skripeli. <sup>19</sup>

These "portraits," may be successful for what they are, but by the farthest stretch of the imagination, they do not delve into or reveal the psychological behaviour of the character. I cannot perceive their interior feelings and motivations, and they remain only original innovative "portraits." While not succeeding in his presentation of nature, change of seasons, landscapes, etc., Gorki does succeed with interior views of the living quarters and meeting places of his characters. Nehkaeva's apartment is exactly right for the type of person she is, or is presented to us as being.

Teplo osveshchennaya ognem silnoi lampy, prikrytoi oranzhevym abazhurom, komnata byla ukrashena kuskami voctochnykh materii, podobrannykh v bleklykh tonakh ugasayushchei vechernei zari. Na stole, na kushetke razbrosany zheltenkie tomiki frantsuzkikh knig, tochno listya strannogo rasteniya. Nekhaeva, v zolotistom khalatike, podpoyasannom zelenovatym shyrokim kushakom, pozdorovalas ispuganno. 20

Dronov's, Frolenkov's Denisov's apartments and even Samgin's lodgings are described well, but they still fail to impart to us any knowledge of the internal composition of their occupants. This is true of all Gorki's descriptions. Taken by themselves, striving for originality of concept, in their own studied way they are successful. But they fail, and with them the book fails, because they all run on parallel courses. The descriptions of characters, their manner of expressing themselves, the descriptions of nature, of apartments appearances, furniture, clouds, buildings, cities exist apart and independently of each other. The descriptions are like streams that course endlessly side by side, and not once do they ever manage to overflow or cross, and thus attempt to produce an integrated artistic whole. Man in Gorki's novel is shown on the background of nature. He is never an intrinsic part of it as he is with Bunin.

With all his artistic devices, aphorisms, proverbs, adages, multitudinous scenes, events and characters, Gorki fails to create a true picture of Russia, or even one which would suggest its flavour.

In Bunin's "The Life of Arsenev," from the very first words of the text, one can feel that they are the words of a Russian philosopher and intellectual. Two stylistic devices that Gorki lacks, but which are natural to Bunin, help to establish this impression. These are his use of rhetorical questions and the use of exclamations, which add a special emotional, yet analytical dimension to his work. The questions force the reader to stop and evaluate the thoughts which have been expressed.

And had I been born and lived on a desert island, I should not have suspected even the existence of death. "What luck that would have been!" I am tempted to add. Yet who knows? Perhaps, a great misfortune. Besides, is it really true that I should not have suspected it? Are we not born with the sense of death? And if not, if I had not suspected it, should I be so fond of life as I am, and as I used to be? 21

Bunin's artistry and genius lies in the fact that he can make us see poetic qualities in the most ordinary of objects, and make us observe and see beauty in things which we may never have noticed before.

But the most marvellous of all things in the town proved to be the boot-polish. Poor human heart! I am not joking in the least: never in my life did I experience from things seen by me on earth--and I have seen many things--such rapture, such joy, as I did in the market of that town holding in my hands the box of boot polish. That round box was made of simple bast, but what bast it was! And with what incomparable artistic skill the box was made! And the polish itself! Black, tough; with a dull lustre and an intoxicating spirituous smell. 22

His descriptions do not suffer from those alien comparisons which are infused into Gorki's writing. With the most ordinary words, gathered into a simple phrase, he can disclose the inner essence of a man, as he does in the description of a convict.

On that face was written something complicated and painful, something which again I had never seen in my life (and which only now I can somehow put into words): a mixture of the deepest longing, sorrow, blunt resignation, and at the same time some passionate and sombre dream, a greedy attention to that departing sun... 23

As a final computation of the two works it is not difficult to see that Bunin's is much wider in scope and concept than Gorki's. The love and feelings which he expresses for Russia are much greater and more vociferous than Gorki's. His presentations of beautiful landscapes, folklore, Russian cities and people, customs



and traditions, his association and proximity to the monumental past--Lermontov, Pushkin--his religious feelings, tie him much more closely to Russia than Gorki's feelings of patriotism. Religious lexicon, taken from the service of the Russian church and references to legendary tales of Russia add to the evocation of its essence. The eternal problems of mankind which he touches through his philosophic character, lift the work out of a simple nationalistic context, and place it firmly in world art.

The two literary works in the portrayal of the Russian intellectual convey very different meanings. Gorki's work in the presentation of an intellectual gives very little, because what he actually creates is an enormous collector of thoughts, who grew to tremendous proportions, and then exploded like a balloon, leaving nothing behind. Gorki began writing with a pre-formed, biased judgement of his main character, a man not connected inwardly with the events of Russian life, but only by his external actions. If we accept that one of Gorki's main ideas was to present a realistic literary portrait of a sympathizer to the revolutionary movement, the previously mentioned Kutuzov, then it has

failed too, because he is only very roughly sketched out. Neither Samgin's crude excursions with women, nor Kutuzov's involvement with art, help in any way to establish a true portrait of the intellectual in the beginning of our century. All that is left are numerous descriptions of everyday physical conditions surrounding people, in which the intelligentsia itself bogs down.

Bunin's hero (all his characteristics help to create a portrait of a Russian intellectual) comes forward poeticized, enriched, intensified with national tradition, by his relations with other people, and nature. That is why Bunin's Arsenev joins the gallery of Russian authors writing about the intelligentsia, something that one cannot say about Samgin. Gorki showed once again that he remained a great master in the depiction of the lower middle classes, but not of the intellectual whom he never liked. During their stay abroad, and both of these writers lived abroad for years, both were by their acquaintanceships tied to the world of Western literature. Bunin entered their midst as an equal member. Gorki in Europe was always a foreigner. This is also later reflected in the fate of the two authors. One is viewed as a local Russian

author who received his world reputation on the strength of his romantic-revolutionary views. When Gorki gave sketches of humble life, he did so with fidelity. The life of tramps he described with extraordinary vigour. When he described the rebel, the man in revolt against society, he could draw from personal knowledge, and thus enlist our sympathies, but with the other classes, especially the educated, he was not equally successful.

Bunin's authority in literature grew gradually, establishing itself, until he had achieved what was his due: through brilliance of style and delicacy of language, a classic on the same level with Tolstoy, Turgenev, and Chekhov. Bunin is the last writer of the nobility, brought up in the traditions of the nobility. He was the continuation of that level of authorship and concern which belonged to Chekhov, Korolenko, Veresaev, etc. In his work he was true to the Russian classical school, but as he lived during the breakdown and collapse of the established order, he carried with him forever his sorrow for the past. His social theme was thus the decline and fall of the patriarchal system of life, in which the eternal themes of love, life and death were discussed.

To conclude, I would like to quote some extracts from an interesting chapter on Gorki by Jurgen Ruhle, which I feel shed some light on Gorki's conflict within himself, and his inability to solve it, as is evident in "The Life of Klim Samgin."

Thus throughout his life the romantic and the realist, the political revolutionary and the liberal intellectual, the man who invents life and the man who sees through the invention, were in conflict. His return to the Soviet Union was a victory for his romanticism...

Gorki the romantic needed Gorki the realist in order to fight the realist. He needed Samginism in order to kill Samginism, and he became entangled in this complicated dialectic. The critic lacerated himself. True, he beat the intelligentsia with their own weapons, by illuminating and destroying one system of phrases after another. But how, in so doing was the Communist ideal to be saved? How was unreason to be defended with the arguments of reason? This is the contradiction on which his project foundered. 24

This question was never answered, and the novel was never finished because Gorki was not able to finish it. He could never resolve the conflict between his desire to support the Bolsheviks and his inability to do so because of his realistic approach.

Despite these tribulations, Gorki has been proclaimed by the Soviets as the "Father of Soviet Literature."

This title, this position, embraces and touches upon the entire complex of themes in literature which are tied to the presentations of Russian intelligentsia. In the opinion of Soviet officials, Gorki exemplified, indeed was the ideal representative of the Russian intellectual and revolutionary. Such an understanding of course precluded the real Russian intellectuals from being counted as such, for they were not attaining new goals in the fields of knowledge and culture. Such Russian intellectuals were the great contemporaries of Gorki, the writers A. Kuprin, V. Veresaev, and the one under discussion here, I. Bunin. Any of them could have been chosen to play the role of "father," or "precursor" of Soviet literature, but they were not chosen to play such a role. Why? Kuprin was the son of a civil servant, Veresaev the son of a doctor, and Bunin the son of a landowner. Gorki however, did not descend from the intelligentsia. His social origin harmonized with the ideas of the Social-Democrat Party members. Neither Bunin, nor Veresaev, nor Kuprin, were acquainted or connected with the ideas of the Social-Democrats, neither were they acquainted with Lenin. Gorki's personal knowledge of Lenin made his

position completely different to Bunin's or Kuprin's, when all three were abroad. All three were known not only within the boundaries of their country, but abroad as well. All three were critical of the new Soviet regime. Nevertheless, for his social origin, and his party connections, Gorki was chosen in preference to the intellectual Bunin and Kuprin. Veresaev, who remained in Russia, could not hope to compete with Gorki because of his own unsuitable origins, because of his title as the spokesman of the intelligentsia, and because of the generally difficult situation in the country, which for a time even refused to admit intellectuals into the party. Gorki was chosen as the leading writer of the new intelligentsia, to which politics were more important than artistic merit.

Once again I would like to reiterate the statement I made in the introduction which refers to the different genres the two works represent. Bunin in "The Life of Arsenev" created a new unnamed genre. In it poetry and prose have joined into a single unit. It is not a novel it is not a story, yet it could be easily called a poem or a recital or a narration. It is not, as Bunin himself declared, an autobiography, for it is too freely adapted

for that. It is the union of the many faceted experiences of a human beings existence, in which the charms and doubts of the world are reflected. It is the authors expression of deep and poetic love for his country, and sadness for the expiration of an era. While doing this, Bunin troops the entire gallery of Russian citizenry before our eyes. In this presentation I wanted to point out how Gorki's devices in the presentation of the Russian intelligentsia leave much to be desired, and how Bunin's artistic compositions prevail over those of his great compatriot. Erroneous as it may seem, voluminous critical appraisals of Gorki's works appear in the Soviet Union with regularity, whereas Bunin has been largely forgotten. It is only recently that his complete works were issued, and even so with deleted passages in "The Life of Arsenev," which seemed harmful to vigilant, wary, authorities.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER I

1 Cited in Moissaye J. Olgin, A Guide to Russian Literature, Jonathan Cape, London, 1921, p. 152.

2 I. Tkhorzhevskii, Russkaya Literatura, Izdatel'stvo Vozrozhdenie, Paris, 1950, vol. 2, pp. 432-433.

3 V. V. Veresaev, Sochineniya v Chetyrekh Tomakh, OGIZ, Moskva, 1948, vol. 4, p. 372.

\* All translations unless otherwise noted are my own.



## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER II

1 Cited in Henry Gifford, The Novel in Russia, Harper and Row, New York, 1964, p. 143.

2 M. Gorki, Sobranie Sochinenii v 30 tomakh, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, Moskva, 1950, vol. 30, p. 282.

3 Gorki, Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 6, p. 239.

4 Gorki, Sobranie Sochinenii, vol. 20, p. 442.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER III

1 I am including several biographical facts which are necessary for a fuller understanding of "The Life of Arsenev."

2 Fedor Stepun, Vstrechi, Tovarishchestvo Zarubezhnykh Pisatelei, Munich, 1962, p. 100.

3 Temira Pachmuss, "Ivan Bunin through the Eyes of Zinaida Gippius," S.E.E.R., 1965-66, vol. 44, p. 342.

4 M. Aldanov, "O Bunine," Novyi Zhurnal, vol. 35, p. 132.

5 I. Bunin, The Well of Days, trans. Gleb Struve and Hamish Miles. Hogarth Press, London, 1933, p. 117.

6 Ibid., p. 308.

7 Ibid., p. 315.

8 Ibid., p. 24.

9 Ibid., p. 23.

10 Loc. cit.

11 Ibid., p. 386.

12 Ibid., p. 365.

13 V. Veidle, "Na Smert' Bunina," Opyty, New York, 1954, vol. 3, p. 86.

14 I. Bunin, Zhizn' Arsen'eva, Chekhov Publishing House, New York, 1952, p. 377.

15 Ibid., p. 388.

16 Ibid., p. 349.

17 Ibid., p. 314.

## FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER IV

1 I. Bunin, The Well of Days, trans. Gleb Struve and Hamish Miles. Hogarth Press, London, 1933, p. 316.

2 Ibid., p. 295.

3 Ibid., p. 156.

4 Ibid., p. 58.

5 Ibid., p. 159.

6 Ibid., p. 172.

7 Charles Ledre, Trois Romanciers Russes, Nouvelles Editions Latines, Paris, 1935, p. 29.

8 K. Paustovski, Blizkie i Dalekie, Izdatel'stvo Molodaya Gvardiya, Moskva, 1967, p. 268.

9 Ibid., p. 271.

10 M. Gorki, Sobranie Sochinenii v 30 tomakh, Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel'stvo Khudozhestvennoi Literatury, Moskva, 1950, vol. 21, p. 46.

11 Ibid., p. 118.

12 Ibid., p. 203.

13 Gorki, Sob. Soch., vol. 22, p. 26.

14 Gorki, Sob. Soch., vol. 20, p. 303.

15 Gorki, Sob. Soch., vol. 19, p. 190.

16 Ibid., p. 76.

17 Gorki, Sob. Soch., vol. 20, p. 143.

18 Gorki, Sob. Soch., vol. 19, p. 496.

19 Gorki, Sob. Soch., vol. 20, p. 272.

20 Gorki, op. cit., p. 216.

21 I. Bunin, The Well of Days, trans. Gleb Struve and Hamish Miles. Hogarth Press, London, 1933, p. 9.

22 Ibid., p. 19.

23 Ibid., p. 20

24 Jurgen Ruhle, Literature and Revolution, trans. and ed. by Jean Steinberg. Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1969, (1960) p. 30.

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