SYMBOLISM, IMAGERY AND COLOR
IN THE WORKS OF ISAAC BABEL

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By
Myra Alloway Salisbury
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[Signature]

Director of Thesis

Master's Committee: [Signature], Chairman

[Signature]

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in the Works of Isaac Babel

Myra Alloway Salisbury, M. A.
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The short stories that brought fame to Isaac Emmanuilovich Babel are dazzling on the surface and impressive in their depths. Lionized in his native Russia in the 1920's, Babel's fame rests mainly on two short story cycles, Red Cavalry and The Odessa Tales. Other works include a series of stories about his childhood, a few miscellaneous stories and two plays published shortly before his disappearance in Stalin's last great purge in 1938.

Critical interests in Babel's works has been sporadic, concentrated especially in the late 1950's after his "rehabilitation" in 1954, and again in the late 1970's. However, Babel's work is so intricate that there will always be something more to be written about it.
Babel did not write for easy reading. He himself has stated that the literary work of art necessarily reflects one man's view of the world, and Babel was a complex man. Impressive as his stories are on the surface, there is much more than surface to a Babel story.

American critics who have investigated Babel's works have invariably praised them, yet some important aspects of Babel's stories have, for the most part, been slighted by these critics. Much has been written about the violence, suffering and brutality depicted in his stories, and there has been much speculation about whether the stories are based on real incidents. Much also has been written about the role of the narrator in Red Cavalry, and critics have reached the consensus that the narrator speaks for Babel himself.

However, although critics have made passing reference to Babel's extensive use of color and the unusual force and vividness of his language, few have given these areas much attention. This study presents a deeper look at Babel's use of color in developing both mood and characterization, the dense amount of imagery he uses in such brief stories, and a discussion of the story beneath the surface story that is found by the reader who looks closely at Babel's stories. It fully supports Babel's claim to fame and suggests that this claim has even firmer base than his critics have acknowledged.
Accepted by: McEwan, Chairman

Frances L. Delphinetino

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Chapter 1
A Master's Palette

Isaac Babel has a reputation for using the fewest possible words. According to Sinyakovsky, Babel's own belief was that clarity and force of language are not to be found in the phrase to which nothing more can be added, but in the phrase from which nothing more can be deleted (302). Such an author would carefully choose every word. In light of this, one can assume that Babel's extensive use of color adjectives serves a vital purpose in his works.

The variety and richness of Babel's palette is striking; rarely is color omitted in his stories. Several critics have noted that Babel's works resemble paintings, but have not elaborated on the subject. The comparison is well deserved: Babel's intense and continuous interest in the visual arts is a recurring topic in the recollections of his family and friends. Babel would certainly have been familiar with the French Impressionist and Post-Impressionist schools; the paintings and theoretical writings of the leading European avant-garde artists had been well known in Russia since the early part of the century. Van Gogh's letters and articles on contemporary French painting by
Matisse, Cezzane and Gaugin had been published in the major art journals. Kandinsky's *The Spiritual in Art*, the bible of the movement, had been translated into Russian before 1915. During the years of World War I and the Russian Revolutions, when Babel was publishing his works, writers and painters worked closely together (Gray 118-119). Babel also had contact with the world of art through his wife Evgenia, an art student, but his strong interest in the visual arts is best substantiated by his own works. The painter and his aesthetics are central to a number of Babel's stories.²

Although there are many pitfalls in comparing the written word with the medium of the painter³, terms for painting techniques serve as meaningful parallels for explaining Babel's use of color. In this paper, references to painting are intended primarily to explain aspects of Babel's color use which are otherwise difficult to illustrate.

There are descriptions in Babel's works that use color in a manner that evokes an atmosphere akin to that attained by Impressionist painters; that is, he paints in verbal pictures, the subtle effects of shimmering colors and fleeting lights—the impressions which describe the movement of light as perceived at a particular moment in
time. "An Evening at the Empress's" (Vecher u Imperatricy) contains several such descriptions:

The crystal spheres filled with swirling dust were still blazing on the ornate brown ceiling. Leaden trickles of water lay congealed on the blue carpet next to my battered shoes (Babel, You Must Know Everything 101).

Light poured down the warm walls in lemon cascades, touching the backs of books, which glimmered bluish gold in response (Babel, Know 99).

Orange lights, wrapped in absorbent cotton, were weaving down the Nevsky (Babel, Know 99).

Also in a later work, "Pan Apolek":

Beneath the moon the road to the church flows in a milky, luminous stream. A shadowy radiance lies on the earth, and hanging from the bushes are necklaces of gleaming fruit
Such Impressionistic pictures in refracted prismatic colors are found throughout Babel's works. However, it is the strong primary colors which predominate. A count of color adjectives in Red Cavalry (Konarmiya) and The Odessa Tales (Odesskie Rasskazy) shows that red, with its related hues, is by far the most commonly used shade. Next in order of frequency is black, then blue, yellow, green and white. Another striking feature revealed by the count is Babel's use of an unusual multiplicity of shades; for example, there are thirteen different shades of red used as adjectives in his stories. Babel is well known for choosing each word with consummate care and deliberation. The brevity of Babel's stories demands that every word be put to use, that nothing be wasted. What, then, is the significance of this lavish use of color adjectives? Why does Babel choose primary coloration, and why such a rich assortment of hues?

The answers to these questions begin with a telling remark by one of Babel's own protagonists, Ben Zachariya, in the play Sunset (Zakat 311). He observes, in a Talmudic-like fashion that "God in heaven washes with red
water...why red and not white? Because red is more joyous than white (Babel, Izbrannoe 358). For Ben Zachariya, as usual in stories by Babel, the choice of color is ruled by the imagination: the emotional impact which a scene, person or idea has determines the selection of color. Thus, we read in Babel's works of "cherry colored birds" "raspberry" and "blue arms," and a moon that is as "green as a lizard" or "yellow as a pumpkin." Insite into Babel's use of color is evident in Marc Chagall's answer to the question of why he painted the preacher of Soluzk with a yellow beard and green face: "I had the impression the old man was green, perhaps a shadow fell on him from my heart" (Meyer 221-222). For Babel the storyteller, as well as Chagall the painter, color is an expression of the inner sense reacting to the images or idea perceived—-it is a way of conveying the psychological response which is evoked in the eye of the beholder.

Many of Babel's hues, such as brick-red, blood-red, cherry, chocolate, cream, orange, lemon or "fiery" are especially telling: they show the author's intent to engage the senses, to elicit by means of color the many subtle varieties of feelings. For example, in the narrator's erotic dream in "Guy de Maupassant," Ipolt's
"tears of delight rolled down a face the color of red-brick, wine and blood" (Babel, CS 334) and the passionate Benya Krik of The Odessa Tales who "spends the night with a Russian woman and satisfies her," is dressed in a "chocolate jacket, cream pants and raspberry boots," and drives a "red automobile" (Babel, CS 218). Just as the painter modifies his shades to obtain varied emotional nuances, so does Babel affect the many subtleties of feeling with his extensive and unique assortment of colors.

The Expressionist painter is known to use strong primary colors to obtain stronger, more immediate reactions. To achieve a more forceful effect, he applies colors in a feverish, violent motion. Similarly, to give greater emotional expressiveness to his images, Babel uses bold, dramatic colors transmitted by strong, energetic verbs:

A druggist sat with his well-groomed head lolling to one side, and the frost gripped the purple heart of the pharmacy....There was no one on the Nevsky. Black vials of ink burst in the sky (Babel, Know 107).
The village was swimming and swelling, and blood-red clay was oozing from its dismal wounds (Babel, CS 187).

And he thrust his sword into the prisoner's throat. The old man fell....From his throat flowed a foamy coral stream (Babel, CS 147).

The blackened Zbruch roared, twisting itself into foamy knots at the falls....The river was dotted with the square black patches of the wagons.... (Babel, CS 41).

Bold, highly emotional colors such as purple, coral, and black, and strong assertive verbs such as swell, thrust, twist enliven and lend immediacy to those scenes of bloodshed, violence and death. They greatly intensify the impact of Babel's war scenes.

The effectiveness with which Babel selects and places his colors is already apparent in his early stories. In the ironically named "Palace of Motherhood," two colors are used to describe the building that has been turned into a home for expectant mothers--the light blue of the interior walls and the wine red of the
exterior facade. These two colors not only add verisimilitude to the story, but the light blue, high-ceilinged rooms reflect also the sorrow and desolation of the occupants of the home—eight expectant mothers with gaunt faces and bare feet shuffling through empty corridors. The sad light blue shade, moreover, is in polar opposition to the wine red of the exterior facade, which evokes a sense of merriment and well-being. The colors of the interior and exterior of the building also mirror their contrast, the tension conveyed by the story's motif: the harsh realities of life and the hoped-for brighter future. Thus, the two colors are so chosen and placed as to perform several functions simultaneously. They not only heighten the illusion of reality, but also accentuate the story's mood while at the same time they accent the underlying conflict in the story.

"Crossing the Zbruch" gives us another example of such artful choice and placement of colors. The vibrant coloration in the landscape descriptions enhances the beauties of nature as well as contributes to the gaiety and playfulness of the opening scene.

Fields flowered around us, crimson with
poppies; a noontide breeze played in the yellowing rye; on the horizon virginal buckwheat rose like the wall of a distant monastery. The Volyn's peaceful stream moved away from us in sinuous curves and was lost in the pearly haze of the birch groves (Babel, CS 41).

Contrasted to this colorful landscape scene is the almost surreal episode describing the narrator's experience in a northern town with its poverty-stricken Jews, abused and scarred by the horrors of war. Blue, the color of sorrow, dominates this episode. Blue is the color of the dead man's blood, whose throat has been torn out and whose face has been cleft in two; and the moon, clasping her blue hands in her round, carefree face, wanders like a vagrant outside the window. This mournful color deepens the mood of the scene and accents its nightmarish atmosphere. The cold, somber blue in the town episode and the warm, bright colors in the landscape, in their contrast, sharpen also the tension between the two scenes: nature, innocent and carefree, and the people's violated, miserable lives. Here the colors are selected both for their import within a specific setting and for
the effect they create when in juxtaposition with the other colors. Babel intends that his readers apprehend his colors not just in sequence, but also at once - that is, spatially, as we experience the colors in a painting.

Blue, long acknowledged as the coldest and saddest of colors, is often equaled in Babel's stories with sorrow: "'Let's have a song,' he said, raising to me ice blue eyes full of dreaminess...The Cossack broke off suddenly and his blue eyes filled with sadness" (CS 188). In "The Palace of Motherhood," the large empty rooms reflect the empty desolate lives of the temporary residents (Know 71). In addition to its emotionally expressive use, blue also designates spatial perspective: The lanky figure of John was coming straight down to from out of the blue depth of the niche (CS 55). And, "On a brick wall shimmered a prophetic peacock - dispassionate apparition against the blue expanse of space" (CS 85). Or "...foals were gamboling in the blue expanse of the horizon" (CS 95).

Babel consistently links some colors with definite states of mind and specific types of protagonists--that is, they have symbolic import. Critics have noted the symbolism of red and its related hues, but only
peripherally, and they have generally overlooked the signification of other colors. For example, Babel usually treats yellow as a depressing, morbid color: "He lived on a yellow, frozen, evil-smelling street" (CS 328). Even yellow sunlight denotes not joy and gladness but anguish and dejection. When the narrator in "My First Goose" leaves the commander to join the Cossack soldiers for the night, "the dying sun, round and yellow as a pumpkin, was giving up its ... ghost to the skies" (CS 74). As the mother in "The Jewess," worn out by the struggle with her memories, trudges through the squalid street of the shtetl, "yellow sunlight lay over the marketplace" (Know 170). Yellow is analogous to isolation and despair, as in "yellow... indifferent walls" (CS 69), or "tragic yellow beards" (CS 86) and "furrowed yellow nakedness of the fields" (CS 92). Yellow is the color of decay and old age. Babel speaks of a "thin, aged man with... yellow cheekbones" (CS 147), "old yellow legs" (CS 152), and a letter yellow with age (CS 121). Significantly, in The Odessa Tales, which describe the opulence and splendor of this city of Babel's childhood, yellow is virtually absent.

In nature, Babel associates pink, like blue, with melancholy moods: "The dying evening surrounded him with
the rose-tinted haze of its sadness" (CS 77); or "Old Gedali...meandered around his treasures in the roseate void of evening" (CS 70). The pink trail in the sky in "The Death of Dolgushov" reflects the speaker's grief:

"Whatever do women go and give themselves such trouble for?" he asked, still more meaningfully. "Whatever do they want engagements and marriage for, and pals to make merry at the wedding?"

A pink trail lit up the sky and died out again (CS 89).

When pink is an attribute of clothing or body, however, it is equated with health and vitality. Thus the adept, agile painter Pan Apolek, is dressed in a "pink bow," "threadbare pink trousers," and his body is pink. The serpent's head in Apolek's painting "The Death of John the Baptist" is a delicate pink, thus underscoring the vigor and animation of the serpent--the symbol of evil (CS 55-64).

Black, in Babel's work as in most Western cultures, is the symbol of death, and those linked with this color
are the emissaries of death: a black cloak drapes Judas' emaciated body in Pan Apolek's painting "The Death of John the Baptist"; the executioner's hair in Apolek's painting of "Saint Valentine's Church" is black; and when, at the outset of the story "The Death of Dolgushov," Korchaev appears wrapped in a floating black cloak from head to toe, he sets the somber mood of the story and foreshadows Dolgushov's death. The fearless commanders Pavlichenko and Budonny are both draped in floating black cloaks as they set out to battle.

Color connotations were eagerly explored by the European Expressionists early in the century (Gray 118) and were the subject of Vassily Kandinsky's The Spiritual in Art. Kandinsky's investigations led him to believe that color, independent of form, has the power to convey the most profound reality. That Babel was familiar with the aesthetics expounded in this work is evidenced in his own work, "Line and Color."

This story centers around a debate between the narrator and Kerensky (leader of the Provisional Government after the first of the Russian Revolutions of 1917). Kerensky rejects the limitations of an art that renders the objective, transitory reality transmitted through retinal vision. He seeks instead to apprehend the
invisible, enduring truth (experienced with the inner eye). For the myopic Kerensky, as for the abstract expressionist painter, color, separate from subject matter, has the capacity to convey that superior, invisible reality. He tells the narrator, who is rapturous over the undulating line in nature:

I don't need your line, vulgar as truth is vulgar. You live your life as though you were a teacher of trigonometry, while I for my part live in a world of miracles....What do I need to see Froken Kristi's freckles for, if even when I can scarcely make her out I can see in her all I wish to see? What do I need Finnish clouds for, when above my head I see a moving ocean? What do I need line for, when I have color? (CS 375).

Furthermore, Kerensky also describes an artistic event which in effect suggests an affinity between music and color. Meaningfully arranged, color, like music, communicates to him a most profound aesthetic experience:

The orchestra is playing the overture to
the third act; the stage is far away, just as in a dream: my heart swells with ecstasy. I see Juliet's purple velvet, Romeo's lilac silk, and not a single false beard (CS 375-76).

Significantly, Kandinsky in The Spiritual in Art, equates the power of color with music and speaks of colors as if they were musical sounds. Considering, then, the subject matter of "Line and Color," one may justifiably conclude that Babel was aware of Kandinsky's aesthetics.

Given Babel's interest in the abstract expressionist's color aesthetics, it is not surprising to find also a close correspondence between the expressive value Babel attributes to certain colors and the evocative qualities Kandinsky attributes to them. In this regard, red and green are of particular interest. Unlike the other symbolic colors, red and green are consistently linked with a specific type of protagonist and, apart from their import within the given group, these colors take on an added, metaphysical significance when viewed in the context of Babel's depiction of humanity at large. A juxtaposition of Kandinsky's comments with examples from Babel's stories helps explain the symbolism of these
two colors.

A warm-bright red, writes Kandinsky, elicits a feeling of "strength, energy, direction, joy triumph." A cold-bright red, he continues, "sounds like a fresh youthful image of a girl" and a red shade, which he interestingly equates with the color of raspberry juice, has, he notes "a distinct bodily, material flavor" (102-107). Babel's Pan Apolek, the painter with the "heretical brush" ascribes the earthy qualities of his spiritual figures not just by drawing the Mother of God with the face of the local priest's housekeeper, but also when painting "raspberry colored warts" on the chins of the apostles (CS 55-63). Raspberry, purple and red are the colors common to Babel's earthy, confident Cossack leaders. The handsome Savitsky, in whom the narrator envies "the flower and iron of that youthfulness," is clothed in "purple breeches" and a "raspberry, tilted cap" (CS 72-3). Dyakov rides a "fiery Anglo-Arabian" is "red faced" and wears silver striped "red trousers" (CS 53). Prischepa (CS 108), Pavlichenko (CS 100) and Budenny (CS 127) are dressed in red, purple and raspberry regalia. These color attributes are expressive of qualities inherent to the nature of these Cossack commanders. That is, color here is that descriptive
detail signifying the features of personality that the individual holds in common with his type. Moreover, not only are these reckless, physical Cossacks of Red Cavalry depicted in red hues, but so are the passionate, assertive Jews of The Odessa Tales, whom they resemble. Benya, the Odessa gangster "king," wears an "orange suit" and "raspberry boots" and rides in a "red automobile" (CS 206, 218). The bold, Jewish "aristocrats of Moldavanka are tightly encased in raspberry waistcoats" (CS 208). Froim Grach's daughter, a woman of gigantic height and enormous hips, has cheeks of "brick-red hue" and is "decked in her orange frock" (CS 223, 229). Color thus identifies and provides a link between those of similar temperament in the various Babel stories. A related function of such color use is illustrated in a late work, "The End of the Old Folks' Home." A single color detail—the raspberry hair of the paralyzed, destitute Simon-Wulf—recalls the strong, audacious Jews of The Odessa Tales, described in like color, and thus suggests, in an instant, the fate of the one-time powerful pre-revolutionary Odessa Jews.

Whereas red, with its various shades, is the color of Babel's active, earthy protagonists, green—a color in direct polarity to red—is linked with the passive,
religious men in Babel's stories. The symbolic connotation of green in its relationship to this group of protagonists has escaped critical attention entirely. Green, writes Kandinsky, represents the passive principle (98). And Babel equates green with what is passive and immobile, as in "the green stillness of the grave" (CS 212) or the dangling breasts in the picture of the Holy Mother that "seem like so many useless green arms" (CS 275). Green is also the color of Babel's passive spiritual people. Gedali, "the tiny visionary carrying a big prayer book under his arm" wears "a green frock coat down to the ground" (CS 70). The static quality of Gedali, suggested by the green of his coat is also echoed and thus reinforced by the other descriptive details in the story, such as the successive mention of dead objects which crowd Gedali's store: "[Gedali] wound in and out of a labyrinth of globes, skulls and dead flowers, waving a bright feather duster of cock's plumes and blowing dust from the dead flowers" (CS 70). Pan Ludomirski, the church bell ringer of "Saint Valentine's Church," like Gedali, the Jew, is dressed in a green frock coat (CS 142), as is the Turkish pilgrim from Mecca, whom Froim Grach encounters on the way to Lyubka's inn: "...an old Turk in a green turban...green and light as a leaf" (CS
230). In "Bargat Ogly and the Eyes of His Bull," Babel speaks of the "green mantle of the Prophet" (Koaw 115).

Further, whenever any of these characters depicted in green or red dress appear in more than one story, the same color detail invariably accompanies his description. When Gedali shows up also in "The Rabbi" or Ludomirski is mentioned a second time in "Afonka Bida," we read: "Gedali in his green frock coat down to the ground is dozing by the wall like a little, bright bird" (CS 57) and "Pan Ludomirski the bell ringer came out in his green frock coat to meet us by the church" (CS 137). When Benya Krik of The Odessa Tales, always in red attire, makes his appearance also in the play Sunset, the stage directions indicate: "Benya...throws off his raspberry headband (Izbrannoe 325). Color is an indispensable element of the description of a character—the badge which identifies him with his group.

The polar colors, red and green, then, differentiate the diametrically opposite groups of protagonists. That Babel's world is divided into two irreconcilable types of people is critical knowledge. What has now become apparent is that this dichotomy is also depicted also in the contrasting colors. Why colors, we may ask? Because Babel, like the Expressionist
painters, attributes to color a mystical core, and utilizes antithetical colors to express the unity contained in the disharmony of opposites. Interestingly, Kandinsky, expounding on the meaning of contrasting colors in *The Spiritual in Art*, notes that the primitive icon painters "depicted the Mother of God in a red tunic and blue cloak draped over her shoulders," and points out that "apparently the artist wanted to show heavenly grace bestowed to man on earth and enveloping him with its heavenly cover" (115). When Babel describes humanity in polar colors, he, like the icon painter, endows mankind with that eternal something which these primitive painters represented in their depiction of the Holy Figures. In fact, Babel's own protagonist, Pan Apolek, conveys the same thing in his pictures of the Holy Mother when he paints her face with the face of the local priest's housekeeper. No wonder the narrator, contemplating Apolek's painting, remarks that he felt "close to solving the riddle of the Novograd icons" (*CS* 191). It also becomes more clear now what Babel meant when, in "The Rabbi's Son," he described the Torah—the God-given law sent to men on earth—in antithetical colors. "The Torah," he wrote, "was sheathed in colors of purple velvet and blue silk" (*CS* 191).
Babel manages to convey by means of color words what the painter seeks to effect with his brush. While there are some descriptions in Babel which recall Impressionist paintings, his color usage is predominantly Expressionist. "A book," he once wrote, "is a world seen through a person...as a man of letters I never had nor could have any other tools except my feelings, inclinations and desires" (Izbrannoe 414). Babel learned well the value of color as a potent and vital medium for describing the world as experienced with the eye of the mind.
Chapter 2
Imagery in Red Cavalry

Babel's use of imagery, like his use of colors, is often alluded to but seldom investigated. Babel's style belongs to the poetic-ornamental prose tendency of the early and mid-twenties, which is characterized by: (1) abundant and often complex figurative imagery; (2) rhythmical, poetic prose; (3) rhetorical devices (apostrophe, exclamation, question); (4) experimentation with a wide spectrum of language resources, especially the vocabulary and phraseology of different classes, regions and professions, such as regionalism, dialects, folk language and imagery; and (5) syntactic distortions, with invented syntax, long complex phrases, ellipses, and broken phrases. All these devices then are combined to allow complex and unexpected ways to create varied stylistic mosaics (Billington 311-19).

Although Babel's stylistic system derives from this ornamental tradition and makes use of many of its devices, his stories were early recognized as radically innovative in style. Stepanov, for example, while affirming Babel's close relationship to ornamentalism, also suggested that the stories were a radical departure
in their compression of the devices into the novella-miniature form¹ (13-14). The novella form in Babel's hands becomes highly saturated, compressed, and tightly knit, and it is precisely this compressed form, combined with an ornate style, which creates the sense of artistic intensity and tension in Babel's prose. He avoided the unstructured, diffuse prose that was characteristic of many of the ornamental writers. Instead, he carefully created a controlled style of his own in which all the elements of a given story are motivated and functional. In a detailed description of the way he works, Babel stresses the importance of compressing the story through the elimination of all superfluous words, of finding fresh, precise images, of paying close attention to the effective use of punctuation, and of building careful phrase and paragraph structure which will create the proper rhythms and patterns of tone (Babel, *Years* 116-17).

The poetic ornamental feature most immediately and vividly discernible in Babel's stories is the dense saturation with complex, startling, and even surrealistic imagery, which is particularly striking because of the brevity of his stories. Besides using many common figures of speech, such as simile, metaphor, personification,
metonomy and oxymoron in simple form, (though generally unusual and striking in context), Babel often extends such figures into extended images, as in the following²:

This scene [the singing of Gottfried and Apolek] looked as if an organ had been brought to Schmerl's from the Church of Saint Indeghilde and on that organ the muses had perched side by side in multi-colored quilted scarves and hobnailed German shoes ("Pan Apolek" 36).

In his short Red life, Comrade Kustov was no end troubled about the treason that is there winking at us from windows, there making fun of the common proletariat, but the proletariat, Comrades, already knows himself that he's common, and it hurts us, our souls burn and beat like fire against the prison of our bodies....

Treason, I tell you, Comrade Investigator Budenko, is laughing at us from the window, treason sneaks through our house with its shoes
off, treason carries its boot over its shoulder
so the floorboards of the house don't
squeak.... ("Treason" 133).

Furthermore, Babel frequently mixes his metaphors to
create unusual, even bizarre, metaphor clusters.

Its [the sunset's] foaming rivers flowed over
the embroidered towels of peasants' fields....
The earth lay like a cat's back overgrown with
the shimmering fur of grains ("The Road to
Brody" 57).

You [the Communist Party] have laid swift rails
through the sour dough of Russian tales
("Evening" 94).

Similarly, he uses not only simple personifying figures
and extended personifying metaphors, but also a more
complex and unusual metonymic personification in which a
psychological quality is transferred from the person to
some part of him or to some contiguous object.

After the expiration of some time, when
night had changed guard and Red drummers had played the dawn on their red drums, then the Cossacks came up to me... ("Salt" 91-2).

[Emphasis here and in subsequent quotes is mine.]

By the ancient synagogue, by its yellow and indifferent walls, the old Jews with beards of prophets and passionate rags on their sunken chests sell chalk... ("Gedali" 46).

Pani Eliza, shaking her attentive gray hair, kept handing me sponge cakes ("The Church at Novograd" 25).

Another frequently occurring device is synaesthesia and the closely related device of attributing sensual qualities or psychological characteristics to abstractions.

The quiet grew rosy ("Road to Brody" 57).

Above the threshing shed droned the dusty gold
of the threshing ( "Zamostye" 126 ).

...outside the window, in the garden under the black passion of the sky, flowed the iridescent avenue ("The Church at Novograd" 26).

It was full of light, was this church, full of dancing rays of light, airy columns and a kind of cool merriment ("In St. Valentine's Church" 104).

Critics have often pointed to Babel's use of hyperbolic adjectives and adverbs, such as "monstrous," "indescribable," "huge," exhorbitant," "countless," and "mighty." Just as often, Babel uses hyperbolic images, which correspond to his general treatment of character and event, such as, "The howling of the carts echoed through the universe" ("Two Ivans" 116).

Babel further enriches and complicates the figurative system of Red Cavalry through the creation of a sequence of images which are mixed (in both form and semantics) so that within one basic image or series of images different figures are combined to produce highly original, and at times surrealistic, impressions. Such
combinations may be simple and brief, as in the following image: "My child's heart rocked on those evenings like a little ship on enchanted waves..." ("Gedali" 46). But this combining of varied figures of speech is most striking when Babel expands it into an extended passage, such as the opening description of nature in "Crossing the Zbruch" or the following passage from "Pan Apolek."

The charming and wise life of Pan Apolek rushed to my head like old wine. In Novograd-Volynsk, that swiftly crushed town, among huddled ruins, fate threw at my feet a gospel that had lain concealed from the world. Surrounded by the radiance of nimbes, I then gave my vow to follow the example of Pan Apolek. And the sweetness of pensive malice, bitter contempt for the curs and swine of humanity, the fire of silent and rapturous vengeance—all this I offered up in sacrifice to my new vow (35).

The figurative imagery in Red Cavalry is interwoven into a dense fabric of descriptive details. The stories are filled with the naming and description of objects,
scenes and people, often leading to the inclusion of
catalogs of things, such as the short catalog naming
Prischepa's traits in "Prischepa" and longer catalogs of
items for sale in Gedali's shop and of the objects in
Ilya's trunk in "The Rabbi's Son." The density of detail
involves not only the naming of large numbers of people,
objects, and actions, but also the frequent qualification
and descriptive enrichment of them through multiple
epithets, prepositional phrases, and participial and
gerund phrases.

Then an old, emaciated man with big, bare bones
on his spine, with yellow cheekbones and
hanging mustaches, stepped out of the crowd
("Squadron Commander Trunov" 109).

Maslak, wheezing, coughing, and enjoying
himself, rode off to the side; the Cossacks
rushed to the attack ("Afonka Bida" 98).

Besides the many dense descriptive passages within
the stories, even the shortest stories have extensive
introductory descriptive passages, such as "Crossing the
Zbruch," "Italian Sunshine," "Gedali," "Berestechko,"
"The Death of Dolgushov," and "The Road to Brody," and/or extensive concluding pictures as in 'the Church at Novograd," "Italian Sunshine," "My First Goose," "The Rabbi" and "After the Battle." Furthermore, in some stories actions are broken into fragments which function to create atmosphere, to provide psychological characterization, to get the reader's reactions. For example, in "Afonka Bida," the scene in which Afonka's horse is killed, is described in minute detail in order to slow down the action at a crucial moment in Afonka's experience. This slowing vividly communicates the overwhelming impact on Afonka of the death of his horse in order to gain the reader's sympathy by showing adequate motivation for Afonka's subsequent revenge on the peasants. In "The Life of Pavlichenko," the detail with which the final confrontation between Pavlichenko and Nikitinsky is related increases the suspense of the scene, further reveals the characters of the two men, and emphasizes the parallels with the earlier scene and the changed relationship between the two men. Finally, in its slow movement toward a seeming reconciliation through recompense, the passage leaves the reader unprepared for the ending, and thus increases his shock and horror as well as his sense of irony, at Pavlichenko's final
revenge.

A striking feature of Babel's detailed descriptive manner and poetic-ornamental imagistic style is its occurrence not only in descriptive and narrative passages, but also in monologic discourse, in skaz stories, and in dialog. Monologic discourse which contains a density of detail and imagery occurs, for example, in Gedali's discussion of revolution in "Gedali" and in the philosophical-historical discourse at the beginning of "The Rabbi."

While imagery (as well as the overall style) of the skaz is in part tailored to suit the character of the narrator, at the same time the skaz narrators use figures of speech which are strikingly similar to those of Lyutov, the narrator.

But my words bounced off the heroic infantry like sheep's dung off a regimental drum ("Treason" 131).

Freedom lay around me in the fields, the grass rustled throughout the whole world, the heavens above me unfolded like a multi keyboard accordion... ("Life of Pavlichenko" 72).
In one case Lyutov and a skaz narrator actually use an almost identical image. In "The Life of Pavlichenko," the hero complains, "I stink like a butchered udder" (100), while Lyutov, in "In St. Valentine's Church" writes, "Sashka's body blooming and stinking like the meat of a recently slaughtered cow, was exposed" (104). The Cossack narrators also use complex extended images, such as the metaphor of treason at the end of "Treason," and the complex sequences of mixed figures of speech, such as those in Pavlichenko's apostrophe to the year 1918 in "The Life of Pavlichenko" (102).

In dialogue, too, the characters seem to speak in poetic-folk expressions and metaphoric language which coincided with the general ornamental narrative style of the cycle.

"Truth tickles everybody's nostril," said Surakov when I had finished, "but how are you going to pick it out of the heap? But he [Lenin] hits you straight off with it like a chicken picking grain" ("My First Goose" 52).

"Cocks only care about one thing," said Sashka,
"punching each other in the mug..." ("After the Battle" 141).

This merging or blending of Lyutov's narration, monologic discourses, the skaz stories, and even dialogue, into one single consistent style functions to create a single controlling authorial "voice" by means of which Babel creates a sense of a unified "world," and thereby a unified vision.

There are two particularly striking features of the imagery of Red Cavalry which are significant, both because of their highly original character and, more importantly, because of their prominent role in expressing the vision of the cycle. These are the combining of different planes of reality within single images and a tendency toward sensual, concrete, physical description combined, at the same time, with an opposite tendency toward abstract, psychological, impressionistic imagery. These features contribute to the exotic richness of the overall verbal texture, and function in close unity with other elements of the story to bring about the romantic-paradoxical vision in the cycle.

The concept of a single perception of different planes of reality -- inanimate objects from the human and
natural worlds, vegetation, animals, humans, and abstract and psychological qualities -- serves particularly to emphasize the paradoxical interconnection of radically different phenomena, and the interconnection of all aspects of existence which are central to the romantic vision of Red Cavalry. Furthermore, the comparisons are not necessarily based on a clear qualitative connection, and thus often create an almost surreal landscape or atmosphere which heightens the exotic nature of the world of Red Cavalry.

...in a mutilated little town which looked like a torn coat...("The Story of a Horse" 80).

Morning oozed out of us like chloroform oozes out onto a hospital table ("Zamostye" 129).

Above the pond rose the moon, green as a lizard ("Berestechko" 88).

By far the most frequent type of combination is that which relates human beings to non-human planes - to things, plants and animals.
...I grew at his door like a burdock, a whole hour I grew there...("The Life of Pavlichenko" 74).

They [the horsemen] galloped out of the village and kept dropping out of sight like bob-up dolls ("Afonka Bida" 99).

Echoes of this fierce, lone combat reached our ears [Afonka's raids on the Poles], echoes of the thieving attack of a lone wolf on a colossus ("Afonka Bida" 101).

The interpretation of various planes is also achieved by combining qualitatively or generically different things within a single grammatical structure.

...no one could see an end to the war, and only Sandy strewed our weary paths with harmonies and tears ("The Song" 143).

Pan Apolek's saints...were crowded into folds of silk and glorious eventides ("Pan Apolek" 37).
Concrete things and abstract concepts are also joined in a number of ways. Often abstractions and psychological qualities are made observable by comparing them with physical objects, by qualifying them, by using concretizing verbs and by animating or personifying them.

He waved before us the faded linens of silence and hostility ("Pan Apolek" 39).

Sidorov...tore to shreds the pink wadding of my imagination and dragged me into the corridors of his common-sense madness ("Italian Sunshine" 43).

O Death, O covetous one, O greedy thief, why have you not spared us even once? ("The Cemetery at Kozan" 77).

Babel also makes abstractions concrete by qualifying them with concrete, sensual adjectives, such as "cool merriment," aromatic fury," and "burning history"; by describing the spaces and time periods in terms of
colors, such as "the blue depth of the niche," and "blue expanses" or by defining a time period in terms of a spatial designation, such as "spacious day."

Conversely, concrete things and people are made abstract through figurative imagery:

Our room was dark and dismal... and only the window, filled with the moon's fire, shone like salvation ("Italian Sunshine" 44).

"Yes," I replied, envying the iron and flower of his youthfulness ("My First Goose" 49).

The shaggy infantry crawled out of its holes and, open-mouthed followed after the supple elegance of this leisurely stream [i.e. the peasant soldiers watched the elegant Cossacks slowly stream by] ("Afonka Bida" 98).

Babel further emphasizes the interpenetration of separate planes of reality by describing some of the figurative images as if they were real, as if Lyutov literally experienced them. Thus his imaginative transformation of reality seems to become reality itself,
as when he describes Apolek's paintings and statues as if he were seeing real life scenes, or in the following brief descriptions:

The stars blazed in the darkness like wedding rings; they fell on Lyovka, got tangled in his hair, and died out in his shaggy beard ("The Widow" 123).

Tender blood flowed from an overturned bottle there above, and I was enveloped in an odor of decay ("Gedali" 47).

Babel occasionally creates metaphors in which he replaces the tenor with the vehicle in a subsequent description, as in the following image from "Salt": "And glorious night spread out her tent. And in the tent were star lamps" (91). In "Gedali," Lyutov uses the image, "This shop was like the box of a curious and important little boy who would someday be a botany professor" (46). Later in the story, when he and Gedali leave the shop, he states, "'No,' Gedali answered me as he locked up his little box" (48). And in "Argamak" he describes the wounded Yikhomolov as follows: "His fingers were all cut
up, and ribbons of black gauze hung down from them. These ribbons trailed after him like a cloak" (151).
Later, Lyutov says, "Tikhomolov, dragging his torn cloak, went to the tethering post" (151).

A further aspect of the imagery supports Red Cavalry's paradoxical vision of reality—the contrastive juxtaposition of radically different images, such as the description of something beautiful in terms of something prosaic or even horrible: the sunset compared to a bottle of spilled blood in "Gedali" and the image of moonlit roads like milk squirted from human breasts in "Italian Sunshine." This type of juxtaposition is used to describe literal images, to scenes within scenes, and to entire contiguous pictorial scenes. This includes the photograph of the coarse and brutal Kurdyukhov family in "The Letter," which is outlined by an ironically incongruous frame of flowers and doves; the contrast in "The Road to Brody" between the beauty of the song and fields and the bedraggled village and ruined town; and the contrast between the beauty and purity of nature in "Crossing the Zbruch" and the destructive army crossing the river.

Contrastive juxtaposition of imagery also occurs in a broader context: the use of dense literal detail with a documentary flavor creates a sense of objective
"documentary reality" which is juxtaposed to the more subjective atmosphere or tone created by wild figurative imagery.

A striking feature of the concrete aspect of Babel's imagery is its visual, "pictorial" quality. Critics point to his abundance of vivid colors and light effects, but emphasize his tendency to describe in terms of line, shape, size, and spatial arrangements, often quoting the narrator-author's adulation for line in the early story "Line and Color." The narrator of that story, who presents the author's viewpoint, objects to Kerensky's refusal to wear glasses so that he can invent his own idealized world. The narrator argues:

Line, divine line, sovereign mistress of the world, has slipped away from you forever. Here we are walking together in a garden of wonders, in the indescribable Finnish woods....And you cannot see the ice-covered and rosy edges of the waterfall over there by the river. The weeping willow which is bending over the waterfall - you cannot see its Japanese decorativeness, the red trunks of the pines are powdered with snow. And the
innumerable grains of snow are sparkling. This sparkling begins as a lifeless line clinging to the tree, and then on its every surface, like a line drawn by Leonardo\textsuperscript{3}, it becomes crowned with the reflection of the blazing clouds. And Fraulein Kirsti's silk stocking and the line of her already mature leg? Buy glasses, Alexander Feodorovich, I beg of you...(202).

Certainly this passage does express a fascination with the line and design of things, but it also reveals other essential aspects of Babel's descriptive manner. The description is decidedly subjective and impressionistic; it includes a small number of significant features as perceived by the narrator and filtered through his consciousness. This manner of perceiving characterizes the following description of a painting of John the Baptist from "Pan Apolek," typical of the descriptive technique of Red Cavalry:

I remember: between the straight, bright walls stood the spiderweb silence of a summer morning. The sun had laid its straight rays at the base of the picture. Glistening motes of
dust swarmed in it. Straight out at me, out of the deep blue depth of the niche, descended the long figure of John. His black cloak hung solemnly on his repulsively emaciated body. Drops of blood sparkled in the round clasp of the cloak. John's head had been torn from his jagged neck. It lay on an earthenware plate, firmly gripped between the large, yellow fingers of a warrior. The dead man's face was familiar to me. A portent of some mystery touched me. On the earthenware plate lay a lifeless head modeled from Pan Romuald, the fugitive priest's assistant. Out of his gaping mouth hung the body of a snake with glittering scales. Its little head, a tender pink and full of animation, vividly sets off the deep background of the cloak (35-36).

Even these passages, oriented toward visual effects and spatial arrangement, are marked by another important characteristic. Babel uses images and epithets which do not designate concrete visual or sensual qualities, but which evoke a subjective mood or psychological qualities of a scene, image or detail. The passage in "Line and
Color," for example, opens with the narrator's praise of "line," "divine line," "sovereign mistress of the world," and praise of the setting "a garden of wonders," "the indescribable Finnish woods." Such images and epithets as "the innumerable grains of snow are gleaming," "lifeless line," "like a line drawn by Leonardo" serve to express the narrator's feeling about the scene, the "feel" of the scene, rather than to add to concrete visual representation. Similarly, in the description from "Pan Apolek," such evocative, vague images and epithets as "spider web silence of a summer morning," "on that repulsively emaciated body," "portent of some mystery touched me," "tender pink full of animation," and "powerfully" convey the mood of the picture as Lyutov feels it, and the impression of St. John's character. The image of the snake, too, is significant not only for its visual effect, but also for its sinister evocation of the personality of St. John and of the treacherous Romuald. Similar effects occur in "Crossing the Zbruch," in which the image of "virginal buckwheat" serves both to evoke the purity of nature and the monastery wall, and also as a pictorial image. The personification of nature with its "weakened arms" and "lopped off head" begin to convey the sinister atmosphere of the scene. And the picture of
Savitsky in "My First Goose" is general and schematic, meant to evoke the ideal Cossack qualities of handsomeness, strength and colorfulness rather than to present a realistic, individualized characterization. This becomes particularly apparent in the final images which make no visual sense but evoke the sensual handsomeness of Savitsky: "His long legs were like young girls sheathed up to the shoulders in glistening black boots (49). Further descriptive passages also illustrate Babel's rich evocation of other sense impressions, especially sound and color. In "Crossing the Zbruch," for example, the description is enhanced by such sensual images as "the odor of yesterday's blood and dead horses dripped into the cool of the evening"; "the blackened Zbruch roared"; it [the river] was full of howls, whistles and songs, which resounded over moonlit snakes and glistening pits" (23). And the image of Savitsky includes "He smelled of perfume and the sweet coolness of soap" (73).

The density of detail in Red Cavalry--the abundant use of color and light effects, other pictorial images, and sound and olfactory imagery--helps to create setting and atmosphere in given contexts and conveys the richly sensual nature of the world of that cycle. Such detail is
thus a part of the elaborate verbal decoration which helps to convey the cycle's romantic-paradoxical vision of reality. However, the density of and emphasis on detail also serve specific symbolic functions in the design of the stories. Some recurring images and details have conventional symbolic meaning while others occur in set circumstances where they take on individualized symbolic functions. Notes and outlines for Red Cavalry show that Babel even juggles details from one story to another, so that they don't so much arise from the situation of a given story, but are consciously fitted into a mosaic pattern (Carden 94). Certain details may, for example, consistently be connected with given characters to evoke set responses in the reader. For example, the colorful, sensuous appearance of the Cossacks which is underscored by their showy clothes, flashing colors and well-built bodies, by the tendency to illuminate them with bright lights, and by their flamboyant gestures and posturings.

Babel uses vivid lighting effects in both decorative and symbolic functions. Noun and verb forms of such words as "shine," "beam," "blaze," "glitter," "sparkle," "flash," "radiance," "shimmer," "flaming," and "fiery" occur throughout the cycle. Night scenes are generally
brightly illuminated by the moon and stars, colorful sunsets set off many stories, and daytime scenes generally take place in the blazing sunlight. Lightning flashes illuminate many scenes at all times of the day. Sunsets and night are favorite settings for Babel because they provide heightened light-shade-dark illuminations for the romantic dreams and confrontations of the characters.

The road to the church flowed beneath the moon in a milky, glimmering stream ("Pan Apolek" 40).

The naked radiance of the moon streamed on to it with inexhaustible strength ("Italian Sunshine" 42).

Then Bida straightened up and looked around the blazing horizon with an anguished glance ("Afonka Bida" 99).

At times such romantic decorative illuminations are used in an almost surrealistic manner to intensify the romantic aura about a thing or person:
Surrounded by the artless radiance of nimbus,
I then gave my vow to follow the example of Pan
Apolek ("Pan Apolek" 35).

They [the Cossack leaders] rode on long red
mares side by side, in identical tunics and in
shining trousers embroidered with silver. The
soldiers, howling, came behind them, and pale
steel shimmered in the ichor ("Chisniki" 135).

Afonka Bida galloped up to us surrounded by the
nimbus of the sunset ("The Death of Dolgushov"
63).

The romanticizing function of lighting effects even
extends to the occasional use of romantic cliches, such
as "flashing eyes" and "flaming forehead."

Other types of images, too, recur throughout the
cycle as symbolic leitmotifs. Music, for example, is a
constant motif. It is associated with the religious
characters as a kind of other-worldly inner song, and
with the Cossacks in the form of folk songs and martial
music. Descriptions of standards, flags and banners provide a recurring decorative image of war. In contrast, images of corpses are strewn throughout the cycle to remind the reader of the horrors of war, as in "Gedali," "The Church at Novograd," "Two Ivans," "In St. Valentine's Church," "Zamostye," "After the Battle," and "The Rabbi's Son." The corruption and degradation of war are further symbolized in the recurring images of feces and urine in such stories as "Crossing the Zbruch," "My First Goose," "Two Ivans," "Prischepa," and "Berestechko." Images of Christ connote goodness and purity on the one hand and on the other persecution and suffering. The most obvious of these is the figure of Sandy the Christ. Christ appears as a symbol of purity and compassion in "Pan Apolek," "The Road to Brody," "Sandy the Christ," and "The Song." He appears as a symbol of persecuted man in "Crossing the Zbruch," "The Church at Novograd," "In St. Valentine's Church," and "The Road to Brody."

Some striking images occur only two or three times in the cycle, and although they are not imbued with major symbolic significance, their recurrence helps link various stories. For example, the image "The desert of war yawned outside the window" appeared in both "The
"Rabbi" and "The Rabbi's Son," and in both "My First Goose" and "Evening" the consoling purity of nature is symbolized in a "motherly" soothing breeze:

Evening wrapped me in the reviving moisture of her twilight sheets; evening laid her motherly hands on my burning brow ("My First Goose" 52).

Night consoled us in our sorrow; a light breeze fanned us like a mother's skirt...("Evening" 95).

A major and striking feature of Babel's style is the use in many stories of associated "controlling images" which function to reveal the meaning of a story, to reflect the narrator's reactions and attitudes, and to guide the reader's responses. The development of these controlling images is vital, then, to an interpretation of many of the stories. Thus, Babel's prose more often resembles the associational movement of poetry more than the logical sequential movement of prose. Because this method of clustering often incongruous images and motifs, Babel might be likened to a master of collage, or perhaps better to a master of mosaics since the variegated and
textured surface of his tales often conceals an underlying design or a transcendent pattern.

The set of controlling images is quite simple in stories which focus on the plot. In these, a few key images give a clue to the meaning of the story. In "Two Ivans," for example, there is little stylistic ornamentation, and Lyutov does not directly evaluate or state his reactions to the characters and events. But the images of disease, feces, decay and death which appear in crucial places in the story provide an evaluative leitmotif throughout this grim tale of brutal vengeance set against the background of the horror of war. Fecal and erotic images in "My First Goose" make a similar commentary, which reaches a climax in the killing of a goose, the ironically symbolic "messing up" of the "pure little lady." Thus the would-be erotic conquest turns into petty brutishness as Lyutov crushes the goose's "white neck" into a pile of manure. And in "Zamostye" the recurrence of images of death, darkness, wetness and exhaustion provide the leitmotif which underscores the main idea of the story—the death in life nature of the world of war. Here, as in "Two Ivans," the images replace direct narrative commentary, as Lyutov is so exhausted that he seems scarcely aware of anything
except his own misery.

Many of the stories in Red Cavalry, especially the more lyrical ones, in which plot is not so central to the development of the story, have more complex sets of controlling images. These include "Crossing the Zbruch," "The Church at Novograd," "Italian Sunshine," "Gedali," "The Rabbi," "The Rabbi's Son," "In St. Valentine's Church," "Berestechko" and "The Road to Brody." In these stories, the verbal elaboration encompassing events is quite complex and the image structure or pattern in itself develops or reveals the primary meaning of the story. The images connected with bees in "The Road to Brody" and the objects in Ilya's trunk in "The Rabbi's Son" are examples of such key image patterns.

In such stories as "Gedali" and "Italian Sunshine" the treatment of controlling images is at its most complex. In "Gedali" the central themes of the clash between the past, present and future and the paradoxical duality of Gedali (representative of the Jews, who is steeped in his heritage and lives in the past, yet is the spokesman for life, joy and a new, beautiful future) are developed primarily through the stylistic ambience of the story. The imagery presents Gedali as a small, curious little boy full of vitality, but simultaneously a puny,
slightly ludicrous, ineffectual old man. In fact, most of the imagery, both literal and figurative, centers on death and decay—the description of the bazaar, the things in Gedali's antique shop, and the images of the setting sun. It is this imagery which conveys the paradoxical mixture in Gedali and the Jews of passionate feeling, living tradition and future orientation versus the present reality of their impotent old age.

"Italian Sunshine," like "Gedali," turns on a basic duality—the opposition between reality and imagination felt and lived as if it were reality—which is realized through the figure of Sidorov, who is played off against the narrator. The imagery throughout the story, which reflects Lyutov's attitude toward Sidorov and understanding of his character, contains echoes of the romantic themes of dream, fantasy, madness, love, melancholy and exotic adventure; thus, it underscores the interpretation of Sidorov as a trapped romantic hero. But at the same time, the stylistic design of the story and the complex system of imagery suggest an ironic interpretation of Sidorov's and the narrator's romanticism.

The romantic themes are further developed in Sidorov's letter, in which he expresses his yearning for
adventure and heroics, for "Italian sunshine and bananas," and his passionate love for Victoria. There are a number of parallels between Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and the image of Sidorov and his love. The play *Romeo and Juliet* takes place in Italy, and when Lyutov first approached Sidorov's desk he sees a picture of the ruins of the Roman forum, which mirrors the scene of the ruins of the city in which Lyutov imagined the figure of Romeo. An even stronger connection is made in the letter, which echoes the *Romeo and Juliet* tragedy in Sidorov's thwarted love for Victoria, "fiancee who will never be my wife" (44). In the last paragraph of the letter his love for Victoria and his desire for adventure and heroics find combined expression in one final pathetic cry of romantic yearning: "Italy has entered my heart as an obsession. The thought of this land which I have never seen is sweet to me, like a woman's name, like your name, Victoria..." (44).

The events described in the letter are made to seem romantic by Sidorov's attitude and by Lyutov's perception of Sidorov as reflected in his imagery. But the imagery and language also contain clues which point to an ironic interpretation of Sidorov and Lyutov. The transformation of a satin-clad Romeo singing of love into a moody
brawler and misfit singing of boredom and assassination can certainly be viewed ironically. Furthermore, Sidorov's plan is patently absurd, and even he, fearing to be dismissed as a "romantic," suggests that if he can't assassinate the king of Italy he would settle for a place with the Cheka in Odessa! The contrasts in language between Lyutov's narration and Sidorov's letter further express the dichotomy between fantasy and reality in the story. The lyrical, poeticized language of the exposition yields in the letter to a colloquial, at times, crude, style. This is most striking in the opening of the letter, where Lyutov's "[he] dragged me into the corridors of his common-sense madness" finds ironical echo in Sidorov's statement:

...lung was punctured and he's a bit unhinged now, or as Sergei says, he's flown off his rocker. He's not the sort that would just go out of his fool mind, after all, he had to take a flight. But enough of that, and time to quit joking around...Let's get down to the order of the day, my dear Victoria...(43).

The letter also contains many elements of Lyutov's
narrative speech: simile, metaphor, unusual images, concretized abstraction, poetic repetition and parallelism. Although these correspondences tend to connect the outlook of the two men, the devices are often used ironically (sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously) by Sidorov and therefore also serve as ironic echoes of Lyutov's style. Thus, just as the exposition gives a romantic interpretation to the events in the letter and Sidorov's character, conversely the letter throws ironical light on both Sidorov's and Lyutov's romanticizing. The reader then experiences a complete set of attitudes as he is drawn to sympathize with Sidorov (and with Lyutov's view of him) and yet also able to maintain an ironic distance from both of them.

The series of images in the conclusion of the story further reinforces and develops the theme of fantasy versus reality. There is an abrupt and striking return to reality as Lyutov, when he has finished reading the letter, lies down on his "dirty bed" and listens to the victimized couple next door bickering—an ironically deflated image of lovers. A number of earlier images are then repeated—the moon, the candle, the ruins, and the royal family—but now with a different aura surrounding them. The room is dark and gloomy like the night, which
here represents black reality. The candle is now just a
candle which has burned down and must be re-lit. Only
outside does the moon, symbol of imagination illuminates
the night "like salvation" (45). Now it is apparent that
Sidorov's romantic yearnings are a mere dream, built on a
picture book of Rome, a "luxurious book with gold edging"
(44), and Lyutov sees the "jagged ruins" (44) of Rome
over Sidorov's "hunched back." Furthermore, a
photograph, torn from a calendar, of the slightly
ludicrous Italian royal family, "the small, frail King,
Victor Emmanuel with his black-haired wife, the crown
prince Umberto and a whole brood of princesses" (45) is
inserted in the book, and again deflates and belies
Sidorov's dreams. And finally, the image of Sidorov
himself as a youthful Romeo is now replaced by the image
of an actual man, a man with an "olive-colored
expressionless face" (44) and a "death-like face (45), a
man reduced to a "lifeless mask" (45). The culminating
image of Sidorov, then, is of a "dead" man sitting in a
small circle of yellow candlelight, surrounded by
darkness--a man with intense passions and yearnings,
surrounded and stifled by an intolerably bleak reality,
sustained only by the slight flame of his imagination, by
his unattainable, somewhat absurd dreams.
Not all the stories in Red Cavalry center on such elaborate controlling images or image patterns, but simply make more conventional use of single symbolic images or pictures, such as the photograph which ends "The Letter," the description of the hunting preserve which provides a symbolic counterpart to the events of the story in "The Song," the black-cloaked horseman and the burrowing bullets in "The Death of Dolgushov," or the snake and cat images connected with Romuald in "The Church at Novograd" and "Pan Apolek."
Babel's extensive use of imagery and symbolism set his stories apart not only from those of other writers of his era, but even from those of modern writers. The unusual similes and figures of speech do much to explain his stories, but they also lead the careful reader to another story, a "hidden" story found in almost all of Babel's novellas.

"The King," the first story in Babel's Odessa Tales, gives an excellent illustration of this technique. Although the plot tells how Benya Krik and his men foil an intended police raid, a different "plot" is hidden in the verbal fabric of the story. To "hear" this tale, one must heed the inner logic of the imagery and attend the motifs that are buried in the word associations. The underlying plot of "The King" is a celebration of the life of the flesh, rites that reflect Babel's insatiable appetite for life.

The story opens at the wedding of Benya's sister Deborah, and the very first words invoke the theme. First, a brief nod toward the sanctification demanded by society before the enjoyment of conjugal bliss may begin-
"The wedding ceremony ended, the Rabbi sank into an armchair"--then, with the religious ceremony over, the actual rites can begin. A description of the tables for the wedding feast sets the scene:

There were so many of them that those at the end thrust their tails right out into Hospital Street. Velvet spread, they wound their way down the yard like so many serpents with variegated patches on their bellies, and they sang full throatedly, those patches of velvet, orange and red (Babel, CS, 103).

The underlined words all emphasize the sensuality of the central image, that of a serpent whose coiled entrance into this garden of Eden (blessed by the presence of a Rabbi) is an insinuation of original sin. The next paragraph begins with a short neutral sentence and then, in what might be called an invocation to the flesh, elaborates on the implications of the original image by introducing the motif of fire:

The living quarters had been turned into kitchens. A sultry flame beat through the soot-
swathed doorways, a flame both drunken and puffy lipped. The faces of the old crones broiled in its smoky rays—old women's tremulous chins and beslobbered bosoms. Sweat with the pinkness of fresh blood, sweat as pink as the slaver of a mad dog streamed this way and that over the mounds of exhorbitant and sweetly pungent flesh (Babel, CS 203).

It is startling to observe how virtually every word in this passage is concentrated upon a single effect. There is the sweet smell of decay about all of this sweating and abundant flesh, and the flames of the kitchen seem to suggest hell as much as they do the cooking of food. The narrator almost immediately tells us he must digress to relate the interesting story of Zender Eichbaum. The supposed digression is really a narrative ruse: it takes us right back to the original theme, for the "story of Zender Eichbaum" is a history of Benya's own violent courtship.

We are told how Benya set about, through terror and extortion, to rob Zender Eichbaum's stock if rebuffed and made his point by putting his threat into immediate action. Benya's final prize, however, is to win
Eichbaum's daughter, and the slaughtering of the cows is really a kind of ritual preliminary to the ensuing nuptials:

They came in the night, nine men bearing long poles in their hands. The poles were wrapped about with pitch-dipped tow. Nine flaming stars flared in Eichbaum's cattle yard. Benya beat the locks from the door of the cowshed and began to lead the cows out one by one. Each was received by a lad with a knife. He would overturn the cow with one blow and plunge the knife into her heart. On the blood-flooded ground the torches bloomed like roses of fire, and shots rang out (Babel, CS 205-06).

The scene is etched against the night like a somber pagan ritual: nine priestlike ruffians officiate beneath nine flaming "stars." The torches, reflected in the sacrificial blood of the animals, burn like sacrificial fires. Then the description is halted for a brief exchange of comic dialogue during which Eichbaum quietly accedes to Benya's demands. The raid has achieved its purpose, but the narrator explicitly tells the reader
that "the wonder came later," that the real story is elsewhere and the climax not yet reached. The awesome ceremonies are invoked once more as the language again takes on its coloring of black magic:

During the raid, on that dreadful night when cows bellowed as they were slaughtered and heifers slipped and slithered in the blood of their dams, when torch flames danced like dark-visaged maidens and milkmaids lunged back in terror from the muzzles of the amiable Brownings--on that dread night there ran into the yard, wearing nought save her V-necked shift, Tsilya the daughter of old Eichbaum (Babel, CS 206).

The word associations here dispel all doubt as to the nature of the ceremony: the torches and maidens performing their dance in front of revolvers, the heifers stained with their mother's blood, and the reference to milkmaids all point to a ritual ceremony celebrating betrothal and the sacrifice of virginity.

Deborah's wedding feast takes on a suitably fantastic air, half bacchanal, half courtly revel.
Relatives and guests all become drunk, and call upon the couple to kiss, chanting the traditional Russian cry of "bitter, bitter." Then, as the wedding celebration draws to a close, there is a sudden moment of excitement. Something is burning:

Over the courtyard there suddenly spread a faint smell of burning...the smoke cloud grew more and more venomous. Here and there the edges of the sky were turning pink, and now there shot up, narrow as a sword, a tongue of flame. The guests, half rising from their seats, began to snuffle the air, and the womenfolk gave little squeaks of fear (Babel, CS 209).

If the words of this climactic passage are compared with those of the story's opening, the cross relationships of the two sections stand out in bold relief. The sultry flame and sweating bodies that began this tale of a wedding feast are reinvoked by the greater conflagration that serves as a climax, but in a new light. The serpent, whose intimated presence at the initial celebration has contributed an ominous note of
damnation, is exorcised and consumed by the devouring flames.

Climaxing the theme of flesh and damnation, the fire unites this understructure with the comic narrative surface that comprises the more obvious strand of the "plot."

The climax is not quite the end of the story. As is frequently the case in Babel's structural schemes the ending consists of a relatively short, sharp stroke that illuminates once more the general outline of the story. Here is the concluding paragraph, in which the main dish of the wedding feast is at last served up:

When Benya got back home the little lamps in the courtyard were flickering out, and dawn was beginning to touch the sky. The guests had departed, and the musicians were dozing, leaning their heads on their double basses. Deborah alone was not thinking of sleep. With both hands she was urging her fainthearted husband toward the door of their nuptial chamber, glaring at him carnivorously. Like a cat she was, that holding a mouse in her jaws tests it gently with her teeth (Babel CS 211).
Babel carries this technique of the story embedded within the language of the surface story into the tales in *Red Cavalry*. "Crossing the Zbruch", the first story in the cycle, is an excellent example of the richly suggestive short story that Babel developed in this book. In its two pages it introduces an atmosphere, a series of motifs, and an array of structural qualities that are characteristic of the book as a whole. The impression of sketchiness is more apparent than real, for like many of Babel's stories, this one opens into widening circles of meaning; it expands under the retroactive influence of the subsequent stories or through the insight of successive readings into much richer and deeper meanings than appear at first.

In the story's title, important events are hidden behind the seemingly trivial. The phrase "crossing the Zbruch" does not reveal that the movement described is actually the beginning of the great Soviet counteroffensive of the war against Poland in 1920. The invasion of Poland, which throughout the story is to be implied as a moment of historical import, is thus introduced only by suggestion. Furthermore, the title contains a symbolic significance as well. The book's very first word, "crossing," suggests one of the major themes
of the work: it implies not only transition, but transformation. For the narrator of the story, the experience of the crossing has the quality of a symbolic act, is both an initiation and an adventure, a departure from one world and a tentative entry into another, a farewell to the past and a headlong rush into the future. This future, which the narrator has committed himself to enter and which he hopes to accept, is a world filled with darkness, horror and death. His acceptance involves both a stepping over of moral boundaries and a possible transference of allegiance.

The opening paragraphs invoke the expectation of a ride toward destiny, of a fateful encounter to be experienced at an unknown destination. The first two sentences move from the brusque beginning of a military dispatch to the suggestion of a historically relevant tradition of violence and oppression:

The commander of the VI Division reported:
Novograd-Volynsk was taken at dawn today. The staff had left Krapivno, and our baggage train was spread out in a noisy rear guard along the highroad, along the unfading highroad from Brest to Warsaw built by Nicholas I upon
the bones of peasants (Babel, _CS_ 41).

This highroad built upon bones leads through a lavish landscape, the description of which abounds in fantastic, dreamlike imagery. The almost baroque coloring marks the spatial movement of the crossing with a corresponding temporal transition from dawn to dusk, from light to darkness:

Fields flowered around us, crimson with poppies: a noontide breeze played in the yellowing rye; on the horizon virginal buckwheat rose like the wall of a distant monastery. The Volyn's peaceful stream moved away from us in sinuous curves and was lost in the pearly haze of the birch groves; crawling between flowery slopes, it wound weary arms through a wilderness of hops. The orange sun rolled down the sky like a lopped-off head, and mild light glowed from the orange gorges. The standards of the sunset flew above our heads. Into the cool of the evening dripped the smell of yesterday's blood and of slaughtered horses. The blackened Zbruch roared, twisting itself
into foamy knots at the falls. The bridges were down, and we waded across the river. On the waves rested a majestic moon. The horses were in up to the cuppers, and the noisy torrent gurgled among hundreds of horse's legs. Somebody sank, loudly defaming the Mother of God. The river was dotted with the square black patches of the wagons, and was full of confused sounds, of whistling and singing, that rose above the gleaming hollows, the serpentine trails of the moon (Babel, CS 41).

The movement described is a kind of descent into darkness and terror as well as a rite. This seems clear from the progression of images: the flowering fields with their ripening grains give way to the smell of blood and of yesterday's slaughtered horses; the myriad colors of a resplendent summer give way to ultimate blackness; the peaceful Volyn recedes into the background as the turbulent Zbruch heaves itself into the fore; the monastery wall imagined in the virginal buckwheat gives way to the violence of someone sinking and loudly cursing the Mother of God; and the beheaded sun rolls down the
horizon to be replaced by the serpentine moon and its gleaming pits. The crossing of the river Zbruch, then, like the crossing of the river Styx, will mark the passage into a place of terror and death.

The narrator reaches his destination and has his encounter with destiny and a vision of hell:

Far on into the night we reached Novograd. In the house where I was billeted I found a pregnant woman and two red-haired, scraggly necked Jews. A third, huddled to the wall with his head covered up, was already asleep. In the room I was given I discovered turned out ward-robens, scraps of women's fur coats on the floor, human filth, fragments of the occult crockery the Jews use only once a year, at Passover. "Clear this up," I said to the woman. "What a filthy way to live!" The two Jews rose from their places and, hopping on their felt soles, cleared the mess from the floor. They skipped about noiselessly, monkey-fashion, like the Japs in a circus act, their necks swelling and twisting. They put down for me a feather bed that had been disemboweled, and I lay down
by the wall next to the third Jew, the one who was asleep. Faint-hearted poverty closed in over my couch (Babel, CS 42).

The encounter is a significant one. The narrator of "Crossing the Zbruch," a figure as yet unnamed and still unknown to the reader, ultimately will be revealed as the Jewish comrade-in-arms of Cossack cavalrymen, and the vision of horror that he here encounters is the world of Jewish poverty and deprivation which he knows from his own experience. The narrator fears that in the wretched suffering Jews whose room he shares, in these grotesque shapes bent by poverty, sickness and fear, he sees the terrible fate of Jewish life. It is this world that he has elected to forsake in pursuit of the newer, brighter one that the Revolution gives promise of bringing: he enters hell as a part of his journey into the light of the future. To embrace the vision of the new world, however, means to abandon all the deceptive visions of the millennium, and in a harsh and bitter image Babel appears to reject the Hebrew belief in a final justification of history. Among the scraps of clothing and bits of human excrement lie fragments of "occult crockery" which the Jews use in celebration of Passover,
broken remnants of a dream of escape into a promised land.

Lying on the gutted mattress beside the sleeping Jew, the narrator falls into a fitful, nightmare-ridden sleep. In a dream he sees Savitsky, the commander of the Sixth Division, fire twice at the head of the brigade commander, whose eyes fall to the ground. "Why did you turn back the brigade?" shouts Savitsky to the wounded man, and with this the narrator wakes to find the pregnant woman groping over his face with her fingers.

Upon the interruption of his dream, the narrator wakens into a terrible reality. With the woman's hands groping over his face, he is somehow related to the figure whose eyes were destroyed in the dream, and yet now he is to have a kind of revelation. The woman takes the blanket from the old Jew at whose side he had been sleeping, and he sees a dead man:

Lying on his back was an old man. His throat had been torn out and his face cleft in two; in his beard blue blood was clotted like a lump of lead (Babel, CS 43).

The narrator's laconic, almost clinical description
is expressive of an almost wordless terror: but with all the story's earlier turbulent energy we have been prepared for some such catastrophe, and we receive it almost with relief. As the story draws quickly to its close still another revelation is made: the pregnant Jewess explains that the dead man was her father and that at the moment of his death he begged the Poles in vain to kill him in the yard so that his daughter would not see him die. The old man's death is thus imbued with a somber beauty, with the sacredness of a martyr's self sacrifice, and the narrator's awareness of the death is accompanied by a vision of that which transfigures death. Amid the degrading filth of wretched surroundings an epiphanic revelation has emerged. Violence, too, exhibits the mark of paradox, a mixture of something holy with something terrible. The story ends, however, as it must, with the unresolved question of the orphaned Jewess:

...And now I should wish to know," cried the woman with sudden and terrible violence, "I should wish to know where in the whole world you could find another father like my father?" (Babel, CS 43).
It remains an unanswerable question, one to which Babel turns again and again in his book: Where is the justification for cruelty and suffering? That the old man knew how to die nobly suggests the possibility of a terrible, awesome beauty in human suffering, but it does not remove death's sting, and it does not answer the daughter's question. Perhaps the answer the story obliquely offers is found in the pregnant woman's womb, in the vague promise of the future, in the hope that this is one of the story's themes, the theme of rebirth.

It is in connection with the narrator himself that the story suggests the pattern of a ritual rebirth. His passage through the river at the story's opening is like the symbolic immersion that traditionally precedes a spiritual transformation. Later, in his requisitioned quarters, he beds down beside death and falls into a troubled sleep. Awakened from his nightmare by the pregnant Jewess, like a delirious child awakened by its mother, he is transferred from his ripped open mattress (a uterine image and, with the dead old father beside him, an image of the tomb as well) to a safer place. These figures of a father and an expectant mother give the story an overtly familial cast; the narrator thus implies the person of the absent son, the figure who is
waiting to be born. The house where he has spent the night is a rude, filthy hovel, but such, too, is the birthplace of gods. This very setting, in which holy crockery lies amid scraps of excrement, supplies the means through which reality is transcended, through which, by the story's end, the death of a pathetic old man has become ennobled in the narrator's transformed consciousness.

As is fitting to the opening story of an interconnected cycle, "Crossing the Zbruch" defines a number of major themes and presents a frame for their interpretation. The narrator of the tale has crossed into another world and has seen a vision of wondrous terrors, but he has been merely a passive witness so far. He has embarked upon his novitiate, but the period of his personal testing remains to be faced. The theme of initiation rites and trials thus becomes a refrain throughout Red Cavalry, and the motif of rebirth, of a need for remaking, is enacted in the remaining stories.
CHAPTER 1


2 Particularly, the stories "Line and Color," "In St. Valentine's Church," and "Pan Apolek."

3 Works which have been helpful in clarifying the limitations of the comparative method in the study of literature and art are G. Giovanni, "Methods in the Study of Literature in Its Relations to the Other Arts," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 8 (1950) 185-194; Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, "Literature and the Other Arts, Theory of Literature (New York: Harcourt, 1956)


The negative connotation this color has for Babel may be culturally conditioned. In Russia, yellow traditionally linked with madness and vice: the insane asylum is called "the yellow house," and a prostitute's passport is yellow.

This kinship between color and music is also
implied in "Pan Apolek." The painter Apolek's "eternal friend" is Gottfreid, the musician.

CHAPTER 2

1 "Novella" in Russian refers to a short story.

2 All quotations in this chapter are from "Konarmiya," Izbrannoe. Translations are my own.

3 Perhaps it is this paean to "line" which has influenced critics to emphasize line rather than color in Babel's works.

4 See Chapter 1 for details of Babel's use of particular colors for given characters.

"planennye," "plament," "ognenyi."
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