Chapter IV

Yury Zhivago's Defense Mechanism

In Escaping from Being a Victim of the Revolution

This chapter will discuss the defense mechanism which is reflected through the main male character in Boris Pasternak's Doctor Zhivago. Yury Zhivago with his sincerity, religious convictions, and independent spirit enters into a conflict with the ideology and practice of the Soviet regime. The wars have victimized him by isolating him from his dear ones, encircling him with poverty and starvation, and throwing him into savagery. Thus, the writer will analyze how his defense mechanism helps him escape from being a victim of the revolution.

4.1 Yury Rationalizes His Anxiety Caused by the Revolution

The first effect of the revolution on Yury is his isolation from his dear ones. Starting from World War I until the revolution breaks out, Yury is assigned as one of the doctors in the Divisional hospital at the front. Following his duty as an army medical personnel that requires him to remain in deserted towns, Yury's only companions are strangers who share the same fate as him at the front. Dealing with this kind of isolation, Yury, instead of grumbling and complaining, chooses to give a rational explanation of this situation,

> That's army life for you...As soon as you get used to one place you're moved to another. I didn't like anything here when we came. It was dirty, stuffy, the stove was in the wrong place, and the ceiling was too low. And now, bless me if I can remember what it was like where we came from, I feel as if I wouldn't mind spending my life in this place, staring at that corner of the stove with the sunshine on the tiles and the shadow of that tree moving across it. (127)

From Yury's statements above, Yury tries to tell how he once hates the kind of life he has at the front with its humble houses. However, as he realizes that that is what is called the army life, Yury, then, begins not only to get used with this kind of life but also to enjoy it.

Then, as he returns to Moscow, Yury finds poverty and starvation everywhere. The rich is replaced by the lower classes. Besides, he is also welcomed with the issues of famine and cold in the upcoming winter. Yury, however, instead of being worried, he says, "A grown-up man is supposed to grit

his teeth and share in whatever's coming to his country" (170). From his saying, Yury tries to say that famine and cold are not something to be worried about. He sees it mere as the time for a grown-up man like him to work harder.

Yury, furthermore, sees the total confusion with its isolation, poverty, starvation, and bloodshed in Russia as something destined. Thus, there is no need for him and other Russian people to look for the cause and the proof of its existence, "...It would be mean and petty to try to dig for the causes of titanic happenings...It's only in a family quarrel that there is a beginning...What is truly great is without beginning, like the universe..." (181). Influenced by that point of view, when the others are helpless in welcoming the winter and try to deceive themselves by regarding their struggle against cold and starvation as their daily struggle, Yury sees this situation as the doom, "...he could see that it was doomed, and that he and such as he were sentenced to destruction. Ordeals were ahead, perhaps death. Their days were counted, and these days were running out before his eyes" (183).

Poverty and starvation caused by the revolution, then, force Yury to neglect his independent spirit. For his and his family's sake, Yury cannot help having to beg for others' mercy. Yury, therefore, tries to convince himself that being helped by others is just something inevitable in this life by writing in his diary, "...Perhaps in every life there has to be, besides the other characters involved in it, a secret unknown force, a figure who is almost symbolical and who comes unsummoned to the rescue, and in mine Yegraf, my brother, plays the part of this hidden spring of life" (283). From Yury's writing above, Yury tries to give an

explanation of his new way of living which is full of dependence by saying that in this life, there must be a secret unknown figure who is destined to help him, no matter he likes it or not, whenever he is in trouble. Thus, it can be said that this kind of dependence is part of the life that cannot be avoided.

Besides isolating and encircling with poverty and starvation, the revolution also throws Yury into savagery. Not only does the revolution force him to witness the cruelty and the horror of the war, but it also makes him commit a murder. Yury is in the middle of mutual combat between the Bolsheviks against the White troops, all of which are first-year students from the universities and top-form schoolboys. Though he does not want to kill any of them, he has to do it anyway,

> But to look on inactively while this mortal struggle raged all round was impossible, it was beyond human endurance. It was not a question of loyalty to the side which held him captive or of defending his own life, but of submitting to the order of events, to the laws governing what was happening before his eyes. To remain outside it was against the rules. You had to do what everyone was doing. A battle was going on. He and his comrades were being shot at. He had to shoot back. (328)

From the statements above, Yury tries to explain his involvement in that combat which actually does not fit his religious convictions. Through those statements, he wants to say that his involvement is not his choice but a must. Thus, the only thing he can do is just to follow it. Furthermore, Yury also says that though he does shoot, he always tries to prevent himself from pointing at those young men, "But as pity prevented him from aiming at the young men whom he admired and with

whom he sympathized...he fired at the blasted tree, choosing those moments when there was no one between his sight and his target..." (328-9). Thus, if he, then, does shoot them, it is mere an inevitable mistake, "But alas! However carefully he tried to avoid hitting anyone, every now and then some young man would move into his firing-line at the crucial moment. Two of them he wounded and one who fell near the tree seemed to have lost his life" (329).

Moreover, Yury, in his desperation for not finding his family and his lover, Nurse Antipova with whom he longs to meet as he runs from the partisan camp, blames God for the whole mess he has been through, "Why has Thou cast me off, O Light everlasting, and cast me down into the darkness of hell?" (386). From Yury's question above, he tries to say that all his sufferings, isolated from his dear ones, encircled with poverty and starvation, and thrown into savagery, are caused by God who has abandoned him. That is the justification he gives for his endless misfortune.

Concerning with the situation in Russia which is getting worse and worse, it becomes more and more difficult for Yury to find a job as he tries to settle with Nurse Antipova. He gets fired on and on. Dealing with this problem, Yury has his own explanation,

> ...It's always the same thing-it happens again and again. At first everything is splendid-'Come along. We welcome good, honest work, we welcome ideas especially new ideas...' Then you find in practice that what they mean by ideas is nothing but words-claptrap in praise of the

revolution and the regime...And it's not the kind of thing I'm good at... (398)

From Yury's explanation above, he tries to say that his difficulty in finding a job and in keeping it is caused by his different point of view toward the revolution which is contrary to the general point of view at that time.

The way Yury explains or justifies his anxiety caused by the revolution reflects one of the types of defense mechanism, namely rationalization. Rationalization is a mechanism in which one tries to justify one's behavior or the reality of situation which is more acceptable to the ego and superego. In this case, Yury tries to justify his isolation, his struggle against poverty and starvation, and his involvement in savagery which are not acceptable for his superego. The usage of this mechanism is to help him reinterpret those unacceptable behavior and situation to make it acceptable.

4.2 Yury Represses His Unacceptable Admiration toward the Revolution

After experiencing wars for years, Yury's admiration toward the revolution changes into disappointment. Yury once admired the revolution very much in its old understanding with all of promises of Russian bright future.Nevertheless, Yury, after the revolution breaks out, changes his mind about it. The revolution, instead of being the sign of better life, becomes the threshold of destruction. All Yury's hopes end in disappointment, "three years of changes, moves, uncertainties, upheavals; death, shelling, blown-up bridges, fires ruins-all this turned suddenly into a huge, empty, waste space" (164). The revolution which is

supposed to create better life for the Russians, so far, has only caused a sea of blood,

> ... firstly, the idea of social betterment as it understood since October Revolution doesn't fill me with enthusiasm. Secondly, it is so far from being put into practice, and the mere talk about it has cost such a sea of blood, that I am not at all sure if the end justifies the means.... (332)

Thus, Yury's great expectation toward the revolution results in nothing but disappointment.

Yury's disappointment toward the revolution, however, still sets a little room in his heart for his old admiration toward it,

> He understood that he was a pygmy before the monstrous machine of the future. He both feared and loved that future and was secretly proud of it, and...was avidly aware of the trees and clouds and of the people walking in the streets, of the great Russian city struggling through misfortune. (183)

This inevitable admiration toward the revolution depresses Yury more. From Yury's saying which says, "...Only I find it to accept the view that they are radiant heroes and I myself am a mean little fellow who sides with tyranny and obscurantism" (398-9), it can be seen how Yury envies the revolutionaries who fight for equality and for justice while he, himself, can do nothing but side with tyranny of the old regime. Thus, it is very ironic. On one side he adores the revolution, but on the other side, he cannot help having to hate it which has victimized him. This ambiguity causes him to ask himself,

> Only once in his life had this uncompromising language and single-mindedness filled him with enthusiasm. Was it possible that he must pay for that one moment of year of rash enthusiasm all his life by never hearing, year after year, anything but these unchanging, shrill, crazy exclamations and demands, ever more lifeless, meaningless and fulfillable as time went by? Was it possible that in one short moment of oversensitive generosity he had allowed himself to be enslaved for ever? (373-4)

Failing to solve his ambiguity, Yury in his powerlessness, then, tries to repress his admiration by completely forgetting that the revolution ever exists,

> ...Why for goodness sake, do I have to know everything and worry myself sick over every blessed thing? History hasn't consulted me, I have to put up with whatever happens, so why shouldn't I ignore the facts? You tell me it's unrealistic. But where is reality in Russia to-day?...It's true that I want to believe that the peasants are better off and the villages are prosperous. If I can't believe that, then what am I to do? Whom am I to believe, what am I to live by? I've to go on living, I've got a family. (222)

From Yury's statements above, he tries to say that there is no need to be worried about the madness in Russia at that time because it will be useless. History never asks for his opinion. He just has to put up to whatever happens. Thus, he thinks that it will be better if he just ignores everything that happens in Russia, represses it all together. Furthermore, to help himself repress the thought of the revolution, Yury, then, tries to think about the good side of the life at that time, about the happy peasants and the prosperous villages.

Yury's attempt to forget about the revolution, however, does not work out for he still unconsciously thinks about it. It can be seen from Yury's dream which shows the contradiction in him,

> His thought swarmed and whirled in the dark. They seem to move in two main circles...Here too were his loyalty to the revolution and his admiration for it, the revolution in the sense in which it had been understood by the students, followers of Blok, in 1905...In it were those omens and promises which before the war, between 1912 and 1914, had appeared in Russian thought, art, and life, in the destiny of Russia as a whole and in his own. Among them was the war with its bloodsheds and its horrors, its homelessness, savagery and isolation, its trials and the wordly wisdom which it taught...Such a new thing, too, was the revolution, not the one idealized in student fashion in 1905, but this new upheaval, born of the war, bloody, pitiless, elemental-a soldier's revolution, led by its professionals, the Bolsheviks. (160-1)

To make it worse, besides being attacked by his own consciousness, there are always people near him keeping on reminding him of it.

Kostoyed, the co-operativist whom Yury meets on his way to Varykino, cannot understand Yury's indifference toward the revolution which is actually the main issue of the time, "...Can you wonder that the villages are restless and can't settle down! And you say they are happy! No, there are a lot of things you don't know, my dear fellow, and I afraid it looks as if you don't want to know them" (222). Not long afterwards, Yury, again, is brought up to a similar conversation.

Now, it is Samdevyatov who starts it by regarding Yury's plan to go back to the land living by the sweat of his brow in Varykino as something naïve and idyllic. Then, the conversation creeps into the revolution. Like Kostoyed, Samdevyatov does not understand Yury's way of thinking either which seems not to understand the spirit of the revolution,

> Are you a child, or are you just pretending? Have you dropped from the moon? Gluttons and parasites sat on the backs of the starving workers and drove them to death, and you imagine things could stay like that? And what about all the other forms of outrage and tyranny? Don't you understand the rightness of the people's anger, of their desire to live in justice, of their search for truth?... (258).

Yury, with his attempt to repress the thought of the revolution including his ambiguous feeling toward the revolution in which his admiration and hate toward the revolution collides, ends the argument by switching the topic into the story of the Mikulitsins, to whom Yury and his family are going as they arrive in Varykino.

Though Yury has tried his best to avoid any conversations about the revolution, his attempt always ends in vain. At the partisan camp, Yury cannot help having to get involved in such a conversation with Liberius Mikulitsin, the partisan leader. Yury tries to drop the conversation by saying he is too stupid for it, but it does not work out. Mikulitsin keeps on pushing him to think and even to comment on the revolution. The attacks come one after another every night without stopping that Yury can hardly control himself that he says to himself,

> Just like a gramophone record, blast him...He can't stop. Why isn't he ashamed of chewing the same cud all these years? How can he go on listening to the sound of his own voice, the wretched dopefriend? Day and night he goes on. God, how I hate him! As God is my witness, I'll murder him someday. (334)

Yury's way to overcome his admiration toward the revolution by repressing it reflects one of the type of defense mechanism, namely repression. By using repression, one tries to take out of his/her mind his/her awareness of something that contradicts what is in his/her superego which in return, allows him/her to have a temporary escape. In this case, Yury tries to repress his admiration toward the revolution since his superego for with all the social values cannot accept the brutality of the revolution. This mechanism, however, does not help much for Yury cannot completely forget the revolution. He is still aware of. Thus, Yury's repression is called a partial repression for he does not completely repress it but not to think too often about it.

4.3 Yury Displaces His Dissatisfaction toward Himself onto People around Him

As stated above, though Yury with his social values opposed the revolution with its horrors, he just cannot eliminate his admiration toward it. This ambiguous feeling makes Yury feel ashamed of himself. He adores the revolution, but he is helpless to be on its side. On the other hand, he knows exactly how horrible the revolution is, but he cannot stop admiring it. Yury, however, instead of being angry with himself, feels annoyed with people around him.

As he returns to Moscow after completing his duty at the front, Yury feels like he can hardly know his friends, "His friends had become strangely dim and colorless. Not one of them had kept his own outlook, his own world. They have been much more vivid in his memory" (174). He, furthermore says that he only feels home with his wife, Tonya, and his father-in-law. Whereas it is actually Yury who is split in two personalities. The first Yury is Yury with his old understanding and admiration toward the revolution, while the second is Yury with his disappointment and hatred toward the revolution which changes Russia into a sea of blood. Thus, it can be said that it is Yury, himself, that has been changed from an idealist to an ambiguous man.

However, instead of admitting his dissatisfaction toward himself caused by his ambiguous feeling, Yury starts to criticize his friends, "Gordon...now he had taken a dislike to his mental image of himself and was trying, most unsuccessfully, to improve on it. He made a point of being jolly, told one supposedly funny story after another and kept saying...words which did not belong to his vocabulary because Gordon had never looked upon life as an entertainment" (175). Besides Gordon, Yury also dislikes Dudorov's change, "He had been as unstable and erratic as a weathercock, now had become an earnest scholar...He discoursed amiably on every subject, his voice never rising or failing from its quiet, rather nasal pitch and his eyes dreamily fixed on one point as if he were lecturing" (176). In other words, Yury tries to say that Gordon who used to be an interesting person, always unpredictable, has changed into a boring expressionless man. However, Uncle Kolya is the most unrecognizable person

among the others, "He was surprised at Uncle Kolya's calm, at his light and detached tone when speaking of politics...It marked him as a new arrival and it seemed old-fashioned and a little embarrassing" (177). Uncle Kolya, his childhood idol, who used to be an inspirational man, now becomes a mere follower who will go where the wind goes. By criticizing his friends and his uncle or by looking at their weaknesses, as stated above, Yury actually tries to release his dissatisfaction toward himself.

Moreover, Yury is annoyed by the view of a partisan boy at the Red Army camp, "He was still wearing his school cap. It slithered continually from his bandaged head and, instead of taking it off and carrying it in his hand, he rammed it back each time, disturbing the bandage and the wound..." (245). Yury is so upset with this boy, "Yury longed to rush out and address the boy in the words which were boiling up inside him. He longed to shout to him and to the people in the railway coach that salvation lay not in loyalty to forms and uniforms, but in throwing them away" (245). From this point, Yury actually longs to shout to himself to make him realize that the revolution is not the salvation for he knows that deep down in his heart, he is on the same side as that boy and other revolutionist. Yury, then, also gets upset with Liberius Mikulitsin, the leader of the forest of brotherhood where he is kept for years,

> It's unspeakable...How can anyone be so dense, so childish! I spend my time dinning into him that our ideas are diametrically opposed...and yet he imagines that his set-backs fill me with dismay and that his hopes can

> cheer me up! How can anyone be as blind as this? For him the fate of the universe hangs on the victory of the October Revolution! (333)!

That saying is, once again, actually pointed more to himself who still cannot put out of his mind the hopes of social betterment since the October Revolution.

Yury's way to displace his dissatisfaction toward himself onto people around him reflects one of the type of defense mechanism, namely displacement. "Displacement usually occurs as a result of repression" (Carver 238). When one is unable to satisfy the urges of the id, a person, then, shifts it from one target to less threatening object or person disconnected to the situation. In this case, Yury is unable to satisfy his self-reproach. Thus, he shifts his dissatisfaction toward himself to people around him by criticizing them for their weaknesses and idealist thought.

4.4 Yury Overcompensates His Ambiguous Feeling toward the Revolution by Condemning the Revolution and Choosing to Focus on His Family and His Job

As stated before, Yury has a contradiction in his heart concerning the revolution. On one side Yury blames the revolution for all of the misfortunes he has been through, but, on the other side, it is just too difficult for him to deny his own admiration for the revolution. His mind is filled with the picture of the isolation, poverty, starvation, and savagery caused by the revolution; but deep down his heart, he takes side with the revolution. Yury cannot decide which one he should follow. How must he listen to his mind without hurting his heart? Thus, in the middle of this ambiguity, Yury, as stated before, tries to repress his

admiration by forgetting the existence of the revolution, forgetting about all of the sufferings the revolution has been brought, and convincing himself that there is still life after all. Not only that, but he also tries to displaces his dissatisfaction toward himself caused by that ambiguity. However, this defense mechanism does not help him much but gives him a temporary escape for he is kept being reminded of his ambiguity.

Thus, Yury's powerlessness in dealing with his admiration toward the revolution, then, turns into cynicism toward the revolution, "Revolutionaries who take the law into their hands are horrifying, not as criminals, but as machines that have got out of control, like a run-away train..." (191-2). The revolutionaries, for Yury now, are just like uncontrollable killing machines which have no pity but desire to kill. Thus, as killing machines which have only been trained and programmed to kill, they create nothing but change and turmoil. Furthermore, from Yury's statements above, we can see how Yury, now, condemns the revolution. He regards it merely as madness and vanity. Life, according to Yury, will reshape itself when the time comes, "...Man is born to live, not to prepare life. Life itself-the gift of life-is such a breath-takingly serious thing! Why substitute this childish harlequinade of adolescent fantasies, these schoolboy escapades (292)"?

Besides condemning the revolution, Yury, then, begins to focus himself on his family, "...I thought, what is there in the whole world worth more than a peaceful family life and work? The rest isn't in our hands..." (170). By saying that statement, Yury tries to say that it is no need for him to think about the revolution

anymore for he can do nothing about it. The only thing he should think is his family. The thought of his family and his job helps him pass through the days in this total madness, "What saved his reason were the everyday details of his life, his work, his worries. His wife, his child, the need to earn, these were his salvation: the humble, ritual daily round, his job, his sick-calls" (183). By focusing on his family and his job, Yury feels like he finds life in the middle of the ruins caused by the revolution.

The way Yury condemns the revolution out of his attempt to compensate his unacceptable admiration toward the revolution, and chooses to focus on his family and his job instead of thinking about the revolution reflects one of the types of defense mechanism, namely overcompensation. Compensation occurs when our best efforts to overcome our weaknesses fail, in this case Yury fails to overcome his ambiguous feeling about the revolution. By using this mechanism, the person, then, starts to look around for some other reasonably satisfying goals and to adopt it instead of what s/he would really have. In this case, Yury, then, chooses to focus on his family and his job. Thus, it can be concluded that in his efforts to protect himself from being consciously aware of his failure in erasing the contradiction in him about the revolution, Yury, then, overcompensates it by condemning the revolution and choosing to focus on his family and his job.

4.5 Yury Sublimates His Anxiety Caused by the Revolution into Poems

Yury, as what has been stated above, is really mad at the revolution which not only victimizes him but also destroys his admiration toward it. It has thrown

his dreams into the sea of blood with its isolation, poverty, starvation, and savagery. However, since he cannot directly express his anger toward the revolution, Yury pours it out into poems.

Yury writes his first poem about the revolution when he gets typhus. He, actually, has been longing for so long to write it down, but he never gets the chance. Thus, as he gets sick and remains at home, he, then, starts to make it in a poem, entitled "Turmoil". In this poem, he tries to describe, "...how for three days the black, raging, worm-filled earth had assailed the deathless incarnation of love, storming it with rocks and rubble..." (206). In other words, Yury wants to describe how in those three days, the love in earth has been shelled by the revolution which he symbolizes as "black, raging, worm-filled earth".

Yury, then, begins to write again when he goes back to Varykino with Nurse Antipova as he runs from the partisan camp. The stillness surround him and also the peaceful feeling in his heart inspire him to write. First, he makes copy after copy of the poems that he remembers best like "Christmas Star" and "Winter Night". From those poems, he goes into his own poem. It feels like his work takes possession of him, "At such moments Yury felt that the main part was not being done by him but by something which above him and controlling him...and he felt himself to be only the pretext and the pivot setting it in motion" (427). This feeling, in turn, helps him forget all his problems caused by the revolution, "This feeling relieved him for a time of self-reproach, of dissatisfaction with himself, of the sense of his own nothingness" (427).

The way Yury redirects his anxiety toward the revolution caused by the revolution reflects one of the types of defense mechanism, called sublimation. Sublimation is a mechanism in which one redirects the feeling that s/he cannot tolerate like anger, sadness, depression, dependency, and helplessness into a more acceptable outlet. In this case, Yury redirects his anger toward the revolution, his depression and helplessness of self-reproach and dissatisfaction toward himself, and his dependency into poems. By using this mechanism, not only can one protect himself from being consciously aware of his anxiety, but he can also produce something as the release. Thus, this mechanism is said to be the most productive mechanism.

From the analysis above, it can be seen how Yury tries to defense himself from the anxiety, anger, fear, sadness, depression, ambiguity, dependency, and dissatisfaction caused by the revolution. To protect himself from being consciously aware of those problems that cannot be tolerated by his ego, Yury, then, employs defense mechanism, namely rationalization, repression, displacement, overcompensation, and sublimation. Unfortunately, all techniques of defense mechanism come to nothing for Yury's anxiety remains untill the end of his life.